

**TONGAN WOMEN IN TRANSITION:
THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN A NEW LAND**

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ABSTRACT
The Search for a New Paradigm in A New World
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The problem addressed by this project is the development of a new paradigm to help the Tongan women who migrated to this new land, how to find means to restore a Tongan woman's traditional role in the family, as the "keeper" or "maker" of the home. Due to the natural course of migration, Tongan women have lost their social spiritual bearing, and there is no doubt, this spiritual and cultural disorientation contributed to the decline of the welfare of the Tongan family.

The Religious Education tool that I have offered in this project is meant to educate the Tongan women in the new nuances of life in the New World.

Based on my experience as a woman pastor as well as the advisor for all the Tongan women, in the 13 Tongan Methodist Churches here in L.A for more than 10 years, I would like to forward a proposal of a new paradigm.

This project proposes a new paradigm in a form of a spiritual retreat. This retreat is to be used as a tool for theological reflections that may lead the women into appropriate transforming actions. The retreat, as an educational model will seek to provide spiritual development for re-stabilizing the women's lives in a new context.

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Chapter 1

The Problem:

In traditional Tongan society, women hold a pivotal role in the life of the family. Although man traditionally is the head of the household, the woman is the nucleus of the *api* or home life. In the over-all scheme of the *api* life, a man's domain is considered to be made up of external factors such as being the bread-winner of the family. The woman's domain consists of internal factors such as caring for the children, with emphasis on building their character and value system, overseers of the family's moral and ethical system. Indeed, the social and emotional well-being of the *api* domain, is in large part dependent on the woman of the home. In the natural course of migration, Tongan women have lost their social and spiritual bearing, and this in turn has contributed to the decline of the welfare of the Tongan family. The Church must effectively address this spiritual and cultural disorientation, and find the means to restore a Tongan women's traditional role in the family, as the "keeper" or "maker" of the home.

Importance of the Problem

Tongan migration into the United States is relatively new. The large influx of migration took place in the early 1980's and continued for the next decade, with some sporadic evidence of migration taking place about 15 years earlier. As a result, most Tongan households reflect the

reality of a people in transition, with apparent evidence of displacement and disorientation. This is evident in the lives of the entire family, with different ramifications for each subgroup within the family. In particular, women's lives have undergone a great change and this change has unfavorably affected the lives of the entire family as a whole.

The Tongan women's pivotal role in the family is reflected in the language. *Ko `api `a fafine*. "The woman is the keeper of the home". This prevalent Tongan traditional saying conveys an integral and defining concept within the Tongan social setting. To put it simply, the woman's disposition and action determines the outcome of the well-being of the entire family. A good woman will in turn produce a good family in all totality. A bad woman or one who neglects her duties at home, will in turn produce a dysfunctional and problematic family. Admittedly, the surrounding society's ability to provide what a family needs to thrive will have some influence on the outcome of the social well-being of the family.

In Tonga, the society had an active role in nurturing young people. The fact that the Tongan society is a homogenous society where people shared mutual values and beliefs regarding the family unit contributed to the welfare and well-being of the family unit. In addition, certain things that were a part of the traditional social fabric in Tonga, such as the communal/village life, the system of extended family, the neighborhood church family, and the traditional Tongan way of living that dictates

obedience on the part of the children, contributed to the welfare of the Tongan family. Here in America these elements are missing.

This central concept reverberates into the wider circle of community living in Tonga. And so it has been said, *ko e siasi, `a fafine*, or “the women makes the church”. The saying suggests the same ramifications for the church, as those shared above with regards to the family. If women are diligent in their roles as the character builders, setting values, and maintaining the internal relationships within the church, the life of the church will prosper. The women in Tonga religiously kept their end of the bargain in actively participating in the life of the church in Tonga. Here in the United States, their priority has shifted, and we no longer see the work of the church and the women’s organization as priorities. This dichotomy is the basis of this project. It is my hope to offer some answers as to why this divergence has taken place in the lives of these women. In turn, I hope to provide some resolution to this problem of lack of involvement and commitment on the women’s part because it is my strong belief that this is directly related to a decline in the Tongan women’s spiritual growth. This decline in turn has contributed to the decline in the welfare of the family.

My search for resolution is presented within the context of a spiritual growth retreat that will be presented at the end of this project. It is important here to note that the resolution I seek may come in a form

that is different from that which I envision. In moving forward, I hope to incite the process of looking for a resolution(s) and be open to where this might come from. This retreat is to be used as a tool for theological reflections that will lead the women into appropriate transforming actions. The retreat, as an educational model will seek to provide spiritual development for re-stabilizing the women's lives in a new context.

A Personal Reflection

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga has been in existence for over a century. For its entire life on the island, the clergy ministry was exclusively a male's domain. There had been no female clergy. But in 1987, this changed. I became the first female ordained minister for the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. My ministry, however, had long been in existence, as I had been an active lay person all of my life, and at that point, had been an employee of the church for many years. My focus at this point was with the Women's Department or *Potungaue `a Fafine*¹, working at the central church administration center, an equivalent of the United Methodist Annual Conference Center here in the United States. Being the first Tongan woman minister, I was immediately assigned to oversee the work of the Women's Department. Working in this capacity, I

¹ This is the equivalent of the United Methodist Women organization. Unlike the Methodist system, the women's organization in Tonga is a part of the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church, and it comes under the umbrella of the big church, so that it is administered through the central administration body of the church.

was privileged to work with all sectors of the woman of the Tongan society. I interacted with everyone from the Queen of Tonga² to the lowly women from an obscure village out in some remote island.

In addition, I was privileged to represent the women of the Pacific Islands at the World Council of Churches. In that capacity, I had the fortune of seeing major cities of the world, from Rome to Geneva in Europe to Sydney and Auckland in the Pacific. But what was even more meaningful to me was the opportunity to meet and see women from all over the Pacific nations. It was a great blessing, and that experience has informed my own work at the present time.

My experience and observations during this tenure form some of the basis for this paper. In particular, I was privileged to closely observe the work of this church's grassroots women's organization. This 5,000 plus strong organization that splintered to each and every local church in villages all over the islands was truly the back-bone of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. These women were proud members of the church and of the community. Their contributions are evident in every aspect of village living from the community at large to the village life, and in the family networks as well. More will be said about this dynamic component of the Tongan church, but suffice it to say at this point, that it was the work of this organization that propelled me into the work of the church

² The Queen of Tonga is the official President of the Free Wesleyan's Women's organization.

with great enthusiasm and energy. I had the opportunity to work and grow within this organization for six years.

In 1991, due to my family situation, I relocated to the United States. Settling in Los Angeles, I quickly found myself in the midst of the Tongan United Methodist Church in the area. As a young and active minister, I had all the intention of becoming as useful as I could during my times in the United States. For almost fifteen years now I have been actively involved in the ministry of the Tongan United Methodist Church in the Los Angeles area. Although the Tongan United Methodist ministries here in the United States are full-fledged members of the United Methodist Church, they have, however, kept remnants of the programmatic aspect of the Free Wesleyan Church from Tonga.³ In essence, what we have here is almost a hybrid of the United Methodist Church and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Pursuant to that, the Tongan UMC women have not fully entered into the United Methodist Women, but have remained a major part of the Tongan UMC ministry as a whole. On an administrative level, they have remained under the umbrella of the Church, rather than a self-governing body such as the United Methodist Women. I found myself, as I did in Tonga, in the position of overlooking the Women's Department in the Tongan United Methodist Church ministries in the Los Angeles area. For the last ten

³ In the United Methodist Church, all ethnic ministries are encouraged to embrace the programs, practices, and polity of the UMC and at the same time retain the form and worship practices that define their individual ethnicity and identity.

years I have worked with the Tongan women in this capacity, doing much of the same work that I did in the islands. Though the work that I am doing now and the work that I did in Tonga are similar in theory and in practice, my experience has been like night and day. The Free Wesleyan Church women in Tonga actively supported the work of the Women's Department. The participation level was very high. Here in the Tongan United Methodist Churches within the Los Angeles areas, the participation level is low and unhealthy. In the past ten years, I have watched many able leaders attempt to improve this organization, and the results have been unsuccessful. Based on these observations, I have concluded that to a large degree, the failure in the women's organization is certainly not due to lack of leadership, but is primarily due to the lack of support and participation from the Tongan women themselves.

I find myself with many questions. In the process of migration, what transpired within the lives of the Tongan women that caused them to abandon the values that led them to actively support the work of women's department or organization? This is the main query that led to this project.

Thesis

This project seeks to develop an appropriate model for nurturing the spiritual life of Tongan women in the United States and doing so in ways that reclaim their traditional spiritual practices as a way of

strengthening different aspects of their lives in the United States. I will approach this through religious education.

Definition of Major Terms:

Some of the major terms that I will be using in this project are defined below:

Ako tapu/Ako Angelo: Holy School or Angel's School. These terms which are used interchangeably refer to a women's covenantal prayer group of the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga. Women of the Tongan United Methodist Church also practice this form of prayer.

Api: Home. The *api* in the Tongan context denotes much more than just the "home." It is in-fact a word that sums up all that goes on within the home. In particular, the internal making of a home, such as personality, value system, character, relationships, and family rituals.

Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga: This Church is the equivalent of the United Methodist Church in Tonga. More than half of the population of Tonga belongs to this church.

Immigrants: A Tongan person who has come to the United States, a foreign country, to live permanently.

Kaluseti: Crusaders. This is a Methodist Women's organization that focussed on promoting Bible studies and other Christian programs for women in Tonga.

Migration: The act of moving from Tonga into the United States, or other foreign land.

New World or New land: The United States of America. This is the place where the Tongan immigrants have settled.

Potungaue `a Fafine or Women's Department: This is a women's organization under the leadership and control of the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga.

Spiritual Growth: refers to that which believers do to advance in the life of faith.⁴

Spirituality: In this context, this term is used to refer to a person's life and activity in relationship to God, to oneself, other people, and all things in reference to God.

Tali Ui: Roll calling is a program that is used commonly in the Tongan Methodist Church. Members are called by name and they respond with a short testimonial regarding the status of their personal spiritual journey, and or a bible verse, followed by a sung hymn, in which everyone joins.

Tapa: a material found in the Pacific Islands, that was traditionally used for clothing and blankets. It is made from the bark of the mulberry tree, which is pounded into long thin pieces of tapa cloth, upon which the women hand paint traditional designs using brown and tan dye.

⁴ John Camody, "Spirituality Discipline and Growth," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abdingdon Press, 1990), 1215-17.

Tongan United Methodist Church: The United Methodist Church here in the United States. This is the home church for the Tongans who are the subject of this paper.

Work Previously done in the Field

Scholarly work in this field is lacking. There is very little written work concerning Tongan women in general, and nothing at all concerning Tongan women immigrant women. In addition, there is no Written theological work specifically on Tongan women. The lack of scholarly work on this specific area has caused me to look into a variety of other areas, and that has been a rewarding experience which has yielded ample resources that have assisted me along the way.

Notwithstanding the lack of relevant work, I have spent a great deal of time on various works in the field of Religious Education, Constructive Theology and Multicultural Theology. These works have been instrumental in providing me with a framework upon which I can produce my own work on this field. They have greatly informed my own process of theologizing and construction of religious education material.

In particular, Maria Harris's Fashion Me a People and Susanne Johnson's Christian Spiritual Formation have provided me with excellent resources for the building a Religious Education program or curriculum. Daniel Alshire's book, Faith Care, provided further foundational work in this field.

One of the primary works that I have used to guide me in this project is People On The Way, a compilation of articles and “*stories* about experiences of how Asian North American Christians identify themselves and are shaped by their rich Asian religious and cultural heritage.”⁵ My project seeks to provide some form of consistent bearing for a people who have been displaced by migration. People on the Way compiles stories of sojourners who are looking for a place to call home.

Despite the lack of written material in this particular field, one piece of scholarly resource comes close to home to the Tongan context.

Keiti Ann Kanongata`a, a Tongan woman who is considered a voice for Pacific island theology wrote the article, “A Pacific Women’s Theology of Birthing and Liberation”.⁶ In it she urges the women of the Pacific into action by using the concept of *birthing*. It is a proactive statement on Pacific island women’s responsibility and obligation to create a new paradigm of living, without losing the past.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

Tongan theology and migration has not been well documented. In particular, there has been no work already done in this particular topic. Hence, my approach here will be partly autobiographical. The purview of this thesis is limited to the writer’s personal interview, observations, life experience, theological studies, ministry and general reading. On one

⁵ David Ng, ed., People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996), vii.

hand, certain concepts which have emerged from the writer's reading research from American resources, will also be identified. The criteria for selecting these concepts from the American resources will be on the appropriateness and relevancy for teaching religious education in a Tongan cultural context.

In addition, this project will focus primarily on women in the Tongan United Methodist Church. Due to my limited exposure, I have concentrated on women in the California-Pacific Annual Conference. Geographically, this work-area includes Southern California, Hawaii and Guam and Saipen. When referring to women in Tonga, I am primarily referring to women in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, the equivalent of the United Methodist Church here in the United States.

Procedure for Integration

This project seeks to develop an appropriate tool for dealing with Tongan women's issue of displacement and disorientation in this country. Such a tool is by definition a Religious Education tool. Hence, I will primarily be working in the field of Religious Education. However, works from the field of Constructive Theology and Multicultural Religious Education have informed my own thought process and work.

⁶ Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, "A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation," in Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church, ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 195.

In doing this project, I will be doing library research. In addition, I will be looking at the Tongan Government archive in Tonga for resources that will provide some historical background on Tongan women, and in particular, Tongan women and their involvement in the Free Wesleyan Church.

A large part of the information that I will be using has come from personal interviews of elder women in Tonga, and women here in the United States. I will also be interviewing members of the Tongan clergy here in the United States and in Tonga. All of the interviews were conducted in the Tongan language and then translated into the English language for use in this project. Furthermore, some of the interviews, particularly those conducted on the elderly members of the Tongan society, were audio taped in order to allow for optimal storytelling possibilities. The content of the audio tapes were then translated for use in this project.

The project will be organized in the following way:

The first chapter will present a thorough introduction of the project. I will concisely state the problem and my proposal for resolving that problem.

I begin the second chapter by introducing the reader to Tonga and the culture, traditions, and character of this island nation. I will then

expound on women's traditional role within the Tongan family, and the society in general.

The next chapter, I will focus on the spirituality of Tongan women. I will expound on the Tongan women's spirituality, as she experienced it in Tonga. In particular, I will analyze some of the common practices that have shaped and formed Tongan women's spiritual lives, such as the *ako-tapu*, *kaluseti* and other practices.

The fourth chapter, I will look at women's role and life within the Tongan/American society. In particular I will draw out the contrasts that create tension in the life of the Tongan women, causing the downfall of the family.

I will then focus on existing works primarily in the field of Religious Education, and secondarily in Multicultural Religious Education and to a lesser extent, Constructive Theology. In particular, I will examine several underlying books that will provide an appropriate context for my project. Some of these books are Fashion Me a People; by Maria Harris, *Faith Care*; by Daniel O. Aleshire, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom, by Susanne Johnson, People on the Way, edited by David Ng, and A Many Colored Kingdom; co-authored by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett. Finally, I will discuss the educational theories on which I have based my educational retreat model and the theology that accompanies those theories.

These will help me present a Religious Education teaching tool that will combine features of life in Tonga and life here in the new land. I am a firm believer in the traditional educational tools of my Tongan context. In particular, it will mean “rolling out the mat” and engaging in a new conversation that will examine practices from my Tongan context in combination with practices from this new surrounding and utilizing that in a new format or paradigm. I will be emphasising the women’s ethnic identity and definition and yet seek a common ground for community in this global village in which women grapple with the reality of disorientation in a new land. The first and probably most important act in this model is for everyone to enter into dialogue and share their stories, despite the difficulty in doing so.

Finally, I will present some of my own reflections as a summary to this project.

Chapter 2

THE TONGAN WOMEN

Tongan Society

The family unit is the backbone of Tongan society. Anthropologists refer to the Tongan society as a kinship society.¹ The word kinship draws attention to the way in which relations or work, maintenance, distribution, consumption, and re-creation are conceived: all are a part of the communal mode of production.² The term *famili* (from the English word family) in Tongan is not the nuclear family: instead, it is an extended network or kin and quasi-kin beyond the immediate household.³ This unit is also referred to as the *kainga*.

In its authentic form, Tonga is a feudal society. Traditional Tongan society takes the form of a pyramid. At the very top sits the ruling monarch, which still exists today. Right below the King are the chiefly families or *'eiki* who are members of the aristocracy by virtue of their blood lines and hereditary title. The next level included the *matapule* or talking chiefs. They represented the chiefly nobles in all matters. The

¹ Christine Ward Gailey, Kinship to Kingship (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1987) 266. Anthropologists have called these societies "primitive," at times in a derogatory manner-stressing a supposed "awkwardness." Some scholars have used the term primitive appreciatively, to call attention to the depth of human history that has been spent in non-exploitive relations. Gailey uses the term "kinship" because it avoids any possible implication of inferiority. Instead, it indicates a communal mode of production.

² Gailey, 267.

³ The words *famili* and *kainga* are synonymous. The latter connotes strictly extended family, whereas the former may also be a reference to the nuclear family. But the interchangeability of these two words indicates the Tongan's emphasis on the extended family unit.

next level includes the vast majority of Tongans, or the commoners. In ancient time the lowest group included the outcast of society.

Tongans place great value on personal relationships within the society at large. "*Koe uluaki api ako `a api.*" This Tongan traditional saying conveys one of the most defining concepts about the life of a Tongan. Literally, "the first place of education is the home or family." Simple in its form, the meaning behind this saying runs deep and forms part of the culture of the Tongan society. It is a culture that holds the family unit, in its true Tongan form, the extended form, highly accountable for the mores of a society. In its extended form, a web of reciprocal duties and responsibilities flowing to and from one member to the other makes up the Tongan family system. Accountability begins from the smallest unit and grows outward to the society at large. And to reiterate the Tongan saying, it is society's expectation that the Tongan parent will instill this truth into the life of their children, so that every child grows up knowing that she is obligated to her family and to the society at large. Although, it is the role of both parents to instill these mores into the lives of the children, it is incumbent upon the mother to do this important work. It is the mother who is charged with instilling the moral system of the home.

The *kainga* was held together by a strong bond of reciprocal duties and responsibilities flowing to and from each member. This strong bond

grows out of a deep-felt love or *ofa*, which is the most valued possession of a Tongan person. Senipisi Langi Kavaliku, one of Tonga's premier educators explained this pervasive emotion in the Tongan setting:

Within the kainga there is a great deal of freedom and kindness [ofa] between members. Each member has his rights and duties to each and every other member of the kainga. When there is help needed by a member of the kainga, the geographically close members go over to help. On big occasions, members from all over Tonga go over to help. It is a duty and obligation of members to help each other just as it is their right to ask and expect help from other members.⁴

Another pervasive characteristic that binds the Tongan communal form of living of *kainga* is respect or *faka`apa`apa* or *toka`i*. It is a feeling that is grounded in love and in knowing one's position in the communal life. And more than just a feeling, it dictates one's action, hence it is love put into action. Kavaliku is on-point in his description:

Faka`apa`apa is more than just respect. To all observers, the outward symbols may seem to be respect but it is not all. Faka`apa`apa encompasses, in Tongan thought, love, humbleness, respect and more. Gifford (1929: 21) writes that the word faka`apa`apa has wide implications which "means among many other things to reverence, to respect, to honour." He was right in realizing that faka`ap`apa has many meanings. But what he didn't realize was that all of Tongan activities, experiences etc. were based on `ofa, an existence peculiar to comprehend or understand faka`apa`apa unless we revert to the question, what is `ofa.

⁴ Senipisi Langi Kavaliku, "An Analysis of 'Ofa in Tongan Society: An Empirical Approach" (B.A. thesis, Harvard University, 1961), 8.

It is necessary in order to understand faka`apa`apa to know the most basic of all Tongan values, and that is `ofa.⁵

Siotame Havea further affirms the concept of *faka`apa`apa* in writing about the notion of sacrifice in the Tongan context: “*Faka`apa`apa* is the institutionalisation of a system of self-denial which is another way of expressing *mo`ui feilaulau* (living sacrificially).”⁶

Women in Traditional Tongan Society

During Pre-Western contact time, most sources agree that Tongan women enjoyed high status relative to European women of the time.⁷ Unlike some patriarchal societies in which the birth of a girl is unfavorable, when a mother brings forth a baby girl, the old ladies will say “you are very lucky.”⁸ The birth of a girl in the Tongan society is the cause of great joy for the immediate family, the extended family and the entire community. In the ideal family, this little girl will always have a position of honor, especially if she is the oldest. “Now the little girl is grown into girlhood and as she grows she is instructed in certain actions, she is told no to do this or that. All this is taken in case her beauty is spoilt.”⁹ As she turns into a young woman, society looks upon her with

⁵ Kavaliku, 14.

⁶ Siotame Havea, “A Theological Perspective on Ethics, Sacrifice and Unity in a Tongan Context” (Ph.D. diss., University of Auckland, 2001), 89.

⁷ William Mariner, *An Account of the Natives of the Tongan Islands*, ed. John Martin 2 vols. (London: J. Martin, 1927), 39 “In Tonga, a woman is always the highest chief.” Edward Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Society* 90 (1929).

⁸ Bain, Kenneth, *The Friendly Islanders*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited), 1967.

⁹ Bain, *Friendly Islanders*, 81.

admiration and respect. She is now a *finemui*,¹⁰ or a young, fresh woman. Her *fefine* or womanness is complete at this point. The Tongans place a great deal of emphasis on this concept of “womanness,” which encompasses, among other things, beauty, chastity and virginity.

Paradoxically, a Tongan woman’s status in reference to other’s in the society is not easily designated due to a complicated system of hierarchy.¹¹ All Tongans are ranked according to three inconsistent relations of superiority and inferiority. Older is superior to younger; maleness is superior to femaleness; sisterhood is superior to brotherhood. It seems clear from these three principles that no one’s status could be determined solely on the basis of gender – or any other single factor – since one’s sibling’s gender and seniority are just as important. The superior rank of sister over brothers gave her unprecedented power and authority over her brothers and their children.¹²

The mother’s family “nourishes” the child, while the father’s family “governs” the child, that is ‘*Oku tauhi e he ni’ihi kae pule e ni’ihi*’ (Some do the caring and others do the governing).¹³

¹⁰ A *finemui* is more than an age distinction. The word signifies a pure, virtuous young woman who may be 21 years old or 30 years old.

¹¹ GAILEY, *supra* note 11, at 48.

¹² A sister’s position of authority gave her certain rights and privileges over her brother, his household and his descendants. Among other things, she could arrange and veto her brother’s children’s marriages; she could command the labor and products of her brother’s spouse; and she had the right to adopt her brother’s children.

¹³ Elizabeth Wood-Ellen, *Queen Salote of Tonga: The Story of an Era, 1900-1965* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), 142.

Hence, at least within the bigger realm of the family, a woman, depending on her seniority and whether she has any brothers may enjoy great power and authority.

Notwithstanding the above societal order, the introduction of the Christian church changed this order. The presence of the church in Tongan villages varied the hierarchy of village living. The growth of the church provided a variance from this general concept.

The church was responsible for another significant change in Tongan society, for it elevated the status of “wife” above that of the “sister”, who traditionally had been the most highly respected member of any kainga. Although the sister was still respected in secular society, in the kainga lotu (church fellowship) it was the wife of the chief of the village and the wife of the minister who were leaders of women’s groups.¹⁴

Given the Tongan women’s position in her *famili*, it is not surprising that most women enjoyed high status in the society. The extended family is the life-line of the bigger society. Therefore, it is consistent that a woman’s position in her *famili* is maintained in the society which depends on the *famili* unit for its viability.

In this web of interconnected kinship and communal living, the Tongan young women, knows her place in society. In the words of a prominent Tongan leader in the mid-fifties, the role of women was described as “women care for the children, attend to household tasks,

¹⁴ Wood-Ellem, 121.

prepare bark cloth, plait mats and weave baskets.”¹⁵ There was no doubt that a women’s work was first and foremost the care of her household. In addition, the production of goods or *koloa* was another of her primary tasks as a woman. In the words of Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, the *koloa* is “women’s durable wealth, consisting of mats, bark cloth, perfumed oil, and (in the case of chiefs) rare and precious objects used in gift exchanges and for presentations. Women produce *koloa*, men produce food.”¹⁶

The work of producing goods or *koloa* is not easy. But for generations, the Tongan women have learned the secret to accomplishing this task: they work as a group or *kautaha*. In such a setting, the group works on a daily schedule in which all work together to finish an item for one member of the group, then they would move to the next member and finish her item. In this manner, each member shares in the production and in the distribution, until each member of the group has a desired item, such as a twenty feet mat, or a fifty feet *tapa* cloth. Foreigners were quick to notice this way of living among the Tongan women:

Women had always had their own associations, notably the *kautaha* or work groups formed under the direction of the chief’s sister (latter the chief’s wife) to make bark cloth. Women sometimes sat together while they wove mats. There were also women who harvested the reefs together. (In fact women were never alone!)¹⁷

¹⁵ Tevita T. Toutaioloepo, “The Tongan Way of Life,” quoted in Kenneth Bain, The New Friendly Islanders (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 47.

¹⁶ Wood-Ellem, 304.

¹⁷ Wood-Ellem, 264.

This kindred spirit of working together was a part of the national character of Tonga. In-fact, it was precisely this form of workmanship that the late Queen Salote utilized in forming a national women's group that had local village counterparts, thus validating a women's work from the local village level all the way up to the national level. In 1954, Queen Salote set up the *Langa Fonua 'ae Fafine* Tonga (Nation Building by Women). The work that was done in this organization was, among other things, sold to tourist and other foreigners, thus providing some economic incentives for the village women. One of the leading women educators in Tonga described this organization in this way:

The Queen had three important aims: to maintain and develop the traditional ways of the Tongan people; to develop the home improvement skills and knowledge of women and thereby their working conditions; to improve the quality of life of all her people. With these skills and knowledge, a woman would gain confidence in her abilities and become less dependent and more self sufficient; and would take pride in her traditions and heritages.¹⁸

Indeed one of the primary *traditional ways* of doing things in the Tongan society is the concept of doing things together, as utilized in the *kautaha*, or work group. It is everyone working together for the benefit of all.

Half a century later this description still has a lot of validity to it, especially in the outlying islands. On the main island of Tonga, and to a lesser degree in the outlying islands, modernization has produced some uncertainty on the traditional division of labor between the sexes. Women have drifted into work outside of the home, as more women

¹⁸ Taufu'ulungaki, Ana, "Elimination of Discrimination," 63, cited in Wood-Ellen, 264.

become more educated, and work places have opened up their industries for more women. However in the villages, there is still a tremendous amount of work that is being done in the traditional way of working together. The production of *koloa* or women's wealth and goods is still being done in the traditional way in which the group works together and finish one item for one member and then moves on to finish one of the same item for the next member and so on until all the members of the groups have an item each. A weaving group of 10 or so may end up making 10 mats of various sizes from 10 feet to 20 feet in length and 8 feet wide.

A tapa-making group may include everyone in the village, since the art of making *tapa* is complex and requires a lot of work from everyone particularly if the object is a 50 feet by 20 feet *tapa*. In this situation, the women who will own the *tapa*, provides the supplies, while the women of the village provide the labor necessary to complete the job. In return, the woman gets a meal for the day, and the unspoken guarantee that if she will need the help of the village women for a similar project, they will be there for her.

The communal cooperation did not end with the production of goods. In-fact, the most fundamental of all women's work, raising and caring for children, is also shared communally. Parenting responsibilities were not within the exclusive domain of the father and mother. Indeed the extended family-members were expected to pitch into the parenting job,

not merely by assisting in care-taking, but more significantly, they were expected to offer and provide guidance to the children, much as the parents would do. And this role did not end with just the extended family member; in-fact the entire village played a role in raising the children. A mother could expect that if the neighbor saw her daughter doing something wrong, the neighbor would reprimand and offer appropriate guidance to the daughter. And the daughter knew instinctively that she was expected to obey and listen to the elders in her village, regardless of the lack of familial relation.

Another marked reality of women's life in Tonga was the scarcity of money. This level of economic impoverishment had the effect of further solidifying the communal life of interdependence in the village. One of the prevalent sayings in Tonga is *koe me`a ongo `a e masiva tangata*, (richness is measured by the availability of people, not money). The underlying idea here is that the lack of people is a greater deprivation, than the lack of money. Within the village life, seldom did anyone undertake a project on her own. In the life of the family, special occasions such as birthday party, or funeral was always a cause for communal effort. The extended family and others from within the village were expected to help in the provision of food, supplies, and to provide the labor that was needed for the occasion. Despite the scarcity of money and other material resources, there never seemed to be a shortage of food, or other needed resources. The corporate sharing that occurred

in the community diminished or obliterated any feelings of scarcity of material goods.

Another distinguishing factor that sets apart women in Tonga is the women's innate knowledge of who she is and her respect for her superior. This was a normal part of life. In a stratified society such as Tonga, it was imperative that women knew where in that social scale they belong, and life in the village was considerably smooth, due to the fact that each person knew what was expected of them. As an example of this orderliness, a foreigner was quick to notice a particular aspect of Tongan society:

Politeness is a way of life in Tonga. Tongans are extremely courteous. It is customary for a Tongan to show extraordinary respect toward anyone considered superior in any way, a custom that can sometimes cause visitors to wonder why they are being treated with such deference. In the presence of a royal, a Tongan commoner will physically lower himself as a gesture of respect demonstrating willing subservience....¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, each member of the *kainga* knew what was expected of her. For the Tongan women, life in Tonga, although hard at times, was fairly predictable, and she played her role well, because she knew what that role was in reference to everyone else in society. This is life in Tonga as women knew it. Migration to foreign lands changed this.

¹⁹ Fred J. Eckert, Tonga, The Friendly Islands (Fredericksburg: Burgess Books, 1993), 16.

CHAPTER 3

SPIRITUALITY OF TONGAN WOMEN

Spiritual Upbringing of a Tongan Girl

Religion, in particular, Christianity, is central to Tongan life. “In few places in the world is religion so central to life as it is in Tonga.”¹ For a majority of the population, growing up in Tonga meant growing up in a church. Church life permeated the life of everyone in Tonga. A child becomes a part of the church life as an infant, and in her early childhood life, she learns quickly that the church is an essential component of her life. Throughout one’s lifetime, the church provides an age-appropriate organization which provides a nurturing environment for the person’s present needs and circumstances. There was a real need for an individual to be a part of the church, just as the church needed that individual. Being a child in the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga meant mandatory attendance in Sunday School from the age of 4 up to the age of 16. Upon completing the last grade in Sunday School, a young person is expected to become a member of the *Potungae Talavou* or Department of Young People. This organization is administered in the same way as the Women’s organization. It is centrally administered through the main church office, with individual counterparts in each of the local churches in the village.

¹ Eckert,, 14.

While programs are facilitated on a local level, there are opportunities for regional and national events and gathering throughout the year. The primary goal of this organization is to provide a nurturing environment where young people can develop spiritually and socially as well. The organization seeks to ensure that the young person is a complete person with particular emphasis on her spiritual life.

A young person's spirituality is a tantamount concern at this stage. However, in addition to that, and quite a part of that notion, is the need to ensure that the person knows her role in the society at large. Accordingly, the programs that are facilitated by the young people organization are geared at promoting not only spiritual growth but also Tongan traditional customs and etiquette. For example, a common activity is a public speech program, where each person is asked to prepare a speech on a particular theme, which would be supported by biblical references. Not only does the person gain some spiritual insights but she also learns the proper form of speech presentation in the Tongan context. Public speech is an art of itself in the Tongan context, and from an early age, young people are encouraged to learn this art. Hence a program such as that described above will have the effect of achieving the Christian education goal of developing the spiritual lives of young people, and it will also have the effect of teaching the skills of proper Tongan public speech etiquette and form.

As a young woman, a Tongan girl has several other roles in the Church. She is almost always a member of the Church choir.² In addition, she may enter into one of several covenant relationships with the church. Among these is becoming a lay-speaker, in which she will conduct prayer service or even do the Sunday morning preaching for the day. As part of this covenant relationship, the young woman covenants to remain true to spiritual principles, such as no drinking, no premarital sexual relationship, and other social restrictions such as no night-clubs or frequenting bars and the likes.

Once a young woman marries, she enters a new social paradigm in all aspects of her life, including the church. She is no longer a member of the *Potungaue Talavou* or Department of Young People organization. With marriage comes automatic membership in the Women's Organization or *Potungaue 'a Fafine*.

Kaluseti (Crusaders)

This is one of the primary means of spiritual exercise for women in the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church. Started in 1955 by the late Queen Salote, this program is similar to Christian Endeavor, but its for women only.³ The substance of this program is in-depth Bible study. Once a month, leaders from the local women's organization of the village

² A church choir consists of most of the members of the church with the exception of the very young children (usually under 15) and the elderly. Usually, the entire church makes up the choir.

³ Wood-Ellem, 261.

churches, usually the pastor's wife and others, would gather together in one central location. At this gathering, women leaders of the organization, or a chosen woman, would give a complete Bible study on a chosen text for the month. On the program's initiation, it was the Queen and other prominent women church leaders who would provide guidance and leadership at these monthly programs. The women who attend this Bible-study training would then return to their respective villages and lead bible studies there for the entire women of the church, passing on what they learned to the women in the villages.

This once a month Bible study occasion was more than just a community learning opportunity. For one thing, it provided the village women with opportunity for leadership. One of the common occurrences within this program was rotating the attendance at the once a month gathering, thus allowing more women to be involved. This program allowed more women to take-up leadership position, and to assume greater responsibility by leading Bible study programs for other women in the village.

In addition, the *Kaluseti* program ensured spiritual nurturing for the women in the church. It was an intentional focus on the spirituality of women. One of the underlying beliefs behind this program is that because women played such a critical role in the formation and maintenance of a successful Tongan family, it was absolutely necessary for them to be grounded in their spiritual life. For instance, the women's

work of molding the morals and character of the younger generation would be easier achieved and appropriately done if the women themselves were attuned to God and the word of God. And so the Church was very intentional about providing spiritual growth programs for the women of the church.

Women celebrated their time together. They enjoyed attending this program. And because of the structure of the church in Tonga, it was almost a certainty that the Bible study programs would be attended by all the women of the church. The underlying Tongan traditional concept of *toka'i* or respect for others helped to bind everyone together, so that one felt almost obligated to attend church functions, out of a deep-felt respect for the leaders of the program. In sum, these programs were always well-attended.

Finally, the *kaluseti* program ensured that there was some form of devotional material for the women. For about two decades now, the bible studies and other planning resources are printed in a small book. This book includes one bible study format for each month of the year. Furthermore, the book is widely distributed so that the women can do the study on their own before joining the others, thus gaining some personal and valuable insights for themselves.

In present-day Tonga, the Kaluseti still plays a major role in the life of the church. Village women attend the monthly bible study which is held in a central area, and then the women would then lead the bible

studies in their respective villages. The studies have become increasingly substantial as more women ministers who studied over-sea take over the leadership roles, and have shared their knowledge and expertise in biblical matters.

Tali Ui (Roll Calling)

Tali Ui or Roll Calling is a program tool used in the Tongan ministry. It is one of the Christian Education programs administered by the church for its entire membership, or a select sector of the church, such as the youth. In a program such as this, the leader will lead in prayer and singing, and then he or she will call each of the participants by name, or call one family at a time. Hearing one's name, that particular person, or a designated member of the family, will respond, by saying "*ko au eni*" (here I am.) He or she will then respond with an appropriate Bible verse or hymn, or just a short narrative which reflects his/her spiritual walk at that point in time. The basic idea behind this program is that God is doing the calling by name, and it is to God to whom we answer. Hence, the idea is to share in truth about one's spiritual walk for God sees everything and nothing is hidden from God. It is a time of holding one spiritually accountable.

For the United Methodist women, roll calling is even more meaningful. The church holds an annual roll calling Sunday for the women of the church. This is a special day celebrated by the entire

church, in a regional gathering of all the churches. The local churches hold their own roll calling in their respective churches, and then all the churches come together to celebrate this day. At this special once a year gathering, the women get dressed up in their best Sunday clothing to attend the gathering, where they are called by name. One woman will represent the entire group, in responding to the call, and then the group will end with a song.

The *Tali Ui* is also a time of affirming one's role in the family and the church. In responding to the call, a woman often refers to her role in the family. The following is an example of a typical response given by a woman in the church:

Here I am. It is a joy for me to be here to join with everyone else in offering thanksgiving to God for His grace which has empowered me to do all that I have to do. As a mother, I can never do all that I have to do without God's guidance and help. He enables me to do all that I have to do....

The *Tali Ui* program provides the woman with a public opportunity to reaffirm her role in the family and society. In so doing, she not only affirms the responsibilities that go along with her role as a mother, but she also establishes her sense of priority. Additionally, she acknowledges the fact that she needs God to enable her to do her work as a mother. Again, the Tongans' strongly believe that the crucial work of instilling morals in children is a mother's job, but for her to do that job correctly, she must seek divine guidance.

Ako Tapu or Ako Angelo (Holy School or School for Angels)

One of the prominent women's only programs that is administered through the local church women organization is the *Ako Tapu or Ako Angelo*, a prayer service with unknown beginnings. Its extensive use by generations of women in Tonga warrants a closer scrutiny of this effective mode of praying, and to that end, I have attempted to gather as much information about it through personal interviews and conversations. In addition, I have included, where appropriate, a short discussion on the relevancy of this practice and its particularities to the Tongan woman and her roles and responsibilities.

What is this form of prayer? To give a simple answer, the *Ako Tapu* is a covenant prayer group that consists of women who desire to be a part of this group and their young children or grandchildren. Prominent among its members are the elderly women of the church. Their main goal and focus is intercessory prayer, although there are several components of the program. The women gather together, usually once a week, in the early hours of the day, usually around 4:00 or 5:00am, and would spend at least an hour in prayer. They would sit together in a large circle, with the children sitting inside the circle. There is no light, other than a single candle or lantern. There are two positions of leadership, both women lead and guide the prayer session in turn.

Another distinctive feature of this prayer group is that there is a sort of uniform that each member wears at every prayer session. A woman would wear her traditional dress and long skirt, covering her legs

all the way down to her ankle. More significantly, she will wear a red scarf or material around her neck. For this reason, this prayer group has been nicknamed by some in the church as the “people who wears the red necklace.” The red is meant to signify the redeeming blood of Christ. For the women in the prayer group, the red scarf is worn not only during the prayer session, but it also becomes a standard part of her formal or church attire. Seldom would she leave the house for church or any other church activity without wearing the red scarf around her neck. More than just a symbol, the ever-present scarf is to remind her that Christ is ever-present with her, and her actions and words should reflect this truth in her life. This commitment is especially crucial in the woman’s home-life.

The *ako tapu* women aspire to live a life that is consistent with Christ’s teaching. One of the basic beliefs behind this concept is that good work will bear “good fruits.” In particular, if the *ako tapu* woman practices what she preaches or speaks of during the prayer session, her household will be blessed. In part, the red scarf acts as a reminder of her commitment to practice what she talks or preaches. This is necessary in the home setting, where her actions must coincide with her speaking in order for her to set appropriate examples for her children if she is to “bear good fruits” in her family. For instance, one of the main subject of exchange for the *ako tapu* session is “love.” Love is spoken of during the *ako tapu* and to be consistent, love should be practiced at

home, by doing things such as sharing one's food or other basic necessities of life with one who is in need. To do otherwise, would be regarded as offensive for one who wears the red scarf.

Basic Structure of the *Ako Tapu* Prayer Session.

Lotu `a e Fanga Lami or Lamb's Prayer. The first part of the prayer is called the "Lamb's prayer", which is a prayer offered up by the children who are a part of the group. Having the "lamb's prayer" or the children's prayer as part of the structure of this women's prayer session is a telling sign of the fact that this a prayer group made up of mothers and grandmothers. And as often is the case, where the mother goes, the children go. Often, a young person's earliest memory of this prayer session involves being a "lamb" or child in this prayer session. The popular notion is that the children may be too young to understand the content of this prayer session and in-fact they may be sleeping the entire time, but the belief is that their presence is important so that they could be lifted up in prayer. Another dimension to having the children be a part of this prayer session is that the women are setting the appropriate example for the children early on in their lives: praying is essential for living. Symbolically, the children sitting in the middle of the circle of women, affirms, once again, the role of the women as protector of their children.

Alelea or Spontaneous Dialogue. The second part of the prayer consists of responsive conversation in which the leader of the group will put forward a Bible verse or a theme, and the rest of the group will enter into spontaneous dialogue about that given subject. This is always a very spirited and emotional exchange that is intermingled with tears supportive words of “yes”, “thank you Lord,” and the likes from the rest of the groups. Once the leader feels that the exchange has heightened to a level of great warmth and grace, she will use certain ending words, which signals to the rest of the women that this particular part of the prayer is coming to an end.

Fitu`i Kelesi or Confirmation of the Seven Faith Tenets. The next part of the prayer is a responsive confirmation of the seven (7) main tenets of faith as proclaimed in the Wesleyan churches. The seven tenets, respectively are, *tui* (faith), *fakatomala* (repentance), *fanau`i fo`ou* (re-birth or born again), *fakatonuhia* (justification), *ohi* (common with Christ), *fakahoahao`i* (sanctification), and *mo`ui ta`engata* (eternal life). The group will once again enter into exchange between the leader and the rest of the group in which members spontaneously name these tenets separately and in order, and affirm once again its relevancy to one’s faith walk. In describing this part of the prayer, the common explanation given is that this is a gradual “kaka `i he kelesi” or “climbing the ladder of grace.” With the last and final affirmation of eternal life, the group is reminded that herein lies the greatest reward of Christian discipleship.

Again, words of celebration and great gratitude characterize this portion of the prayer session.

The verbal affirmations of the seven tenets of faith are critical for an understanding and affirmation of one's faith and spirituality. This is an integral part of the prayer session that allows the women to fully grasp the guiding principles or rules of living a Christian life. In that sense, the seven tenets become much more than just abstract concepts.

In the home setting, where the Tongan women play various roles such as mother, wife, and daughter/sister/mother-in-law, many of these tenets take on a functional or practical dimension. The mother or wife's role in the extended family is complicated by the various competing interest within the family group. For example, to her children, she is the nurturing mother, but to her mother-in-law, she may be seen as a "child" who needs to be guided, and in relation to her sister-in-law, she may be seen as an "outsider" to the family unit. This level of interaction is often fraught with confusion and sometimes chaos. For that reason, it is even more important that the mother/wife in the home practice her faith. *Tui* or faith then becomes the underlying tenet that holds an extended family together. It is primarily the women's faith in God that allows her to effectively navigate her way around in the home so that she is able to play all her different roles. Faith in the Tongan family system is also critical for the woman to be effective in the home.

Likewise, *fakatomala* or repentance is another necessary component to practice in an extended family household. True repentance occurs only after admitting sin. The *ako tapu* woman practices this in her relation to God, but she must also practice it in her household. Mistakes are prone to occur in her relationship with other members of the extended household, and the ability to admit the mistake, or to offer forgiveness when necessary, will ensure that the *ako tapu* woman can effectively handle the job of administering an extended household.

Fakatonuhia or justification is another concept that the *ako tapu* woman can utilize in the home. As the woman of the household, she often plays the role of an arbitrator, settling disagreements between children or between adult members of the household. Pursuant to this particular tenet of faith, God becomes her source of justification. By practicing this notion in the household, she thereby affirms it on a practical level, and not merely on a verbal level, as during the *ako tapu* session.

The notion of *ohi* or bringing one into the family of Christ can be easily understood in the Tongan setting. *Ohi* is also the term used for “adoption” in Tongan. The *ako tapu* woman verbally affirms that she has been made a part of the family of God at the prayer session. By extension, she can affirm and celebrate this fact in her role as mother/wife because she is expected by society to openly receive and *ohi*

or adopt anyone who may need a home. In the Tongan setting, a woman is expected to have this maternal instinct to love and nurture. This is, among other reasons, the primary reason for the absence of the problem of homelessness in Tonga.

Finally, a mother is also a spiritual guide and teacher at home. The seven tents of faith become a subject of learning for the children in the home. The *ako tapu* woman strongly believes that the work of laying this foundation early in the life of the children will prove to be a good thing for the well-being of the children, and by extension, the well-being of the family as a whole.

Fua or Lifting up the Burdens. The last and final part of this prayer session is what is called the *fua* or (carrying). Essentially, this is the carrying of all burdens and lifting it to God, in intercessory prayer. This is considered to be the most significant part of the prayer. However, the other two components certainly build up to this last phase. Various ways of doing this part are used, however, usually it would entail, the entire group praying individually together in unison and ending with the leader asking everyone to lift up all their burdens to God. The leader will then enter into a final prayer in which she will lift up each and everyone that is present in intercessory prayer. She will then pray for other concerns which have become the official prayer list concern of the group. She will reiterate those needs one by one. These needs are communicated to the group, by the members of the group, or by anyone,

and those needs become the official prayer list of the group, which can be added to and subtracted from it from time to time. Some generic concerns that are reiterated at every Ako Tapu circle are: the ministers and the church's ministry, the king and queen of Tonga and their house, the cabinet and the Tongan government, the children of the church, and all other Ako Tapu "house" or circle. At the end, she will recite certain words that once again signal the end of the prayer for the whole group.

This very act of *fua* or carrying is one of the defining images of a mother in the Tongan society. A mother is always seen carrying a child. For many *ako tapu* participants, it is this practice of *fua* of lifting not only their children in prayer, but lifting up all of their burdens, that prompts them to be a member of the *ako tapu*. During this part of the session, the participant is lifted up in prayer in the following manner: "I lift Sela who is a mother, a wife, a pastor..." There is intentional praying for Sela in all of her roles in the family or society. Inherent in this prayer is the belief that within these roles are many, many responsibilities that must be carried out in order to effectuate a meaningful life not just for her but for those in her family. Not only is the participant lifted up, but her children, husband, and other family members are lifted up in prayer. In short, this practice of lifting up in prayer during the *ako tapu* is a powerful concession by the *ako tapu* women that it is only through the divine guidance of God that she can effectively that these women can carry out their responsibilities in the home and society.

History of the Ako Tapu or Holy School

Like so much of Tongan history, this very rich part of women's heritage remains untold and undocumented. One of the primary queries that remains unanswered is when did the Ako Tapu begin and who started this vital part of Tongan women's ministry. About one of the only written references I have found in reference to the subject appears in Elizabeth Wood-Ellem's book:

The Free Wesleyan Church conspicuously deferred to the Queen's authority as leader of the church, and openly expressed its support in prayers and sermons. Each year she advised Page on the appointments of ministers to different parishes, and on promotions to positions of greater responsibility. *She took over the women's organization known as the Ako Tapu or Ako Angelo (Holy School or School for Angels) (Italics mine).*⁴

In terms of time, the above reference dates to about the late 1920's. And it seems clear from this reference that the Ako Tapu was already in existence, at least at this time of Queen Salote's reign.

Information gleaned from personal interviews and conversations offer conflicting answers to the queries stated above. Most sources credit the beginning of this prayer group to Queen Salote herself, noting that this was one of the means in which she tried to find comfort and meaning in a life that was full of sorrow and great challenges.⁵

Queen Salote's mother passed away when she was only three, and she inherited the throne at the young age of 18. Her reign was characterized

⁴ Wood-Ellem. 121.

⁵ Sauliloa Niumeitolu, Conversation with author, 2004. Niumeitolu is a wife of a Retired Senior Elder.

by personal and political turmoil. Despite the difference in the authorship of this prayer group, there is strong agreement on Queen Salote's strong support of this group. She was very involved in ensuring that each village church had a Ako Tapu group installed.⁶ She would travel from village to village installing new group leaders and promoting the prayer group. In addition, there would on occasion be large communal Ako Tapu regional sessions with women coming from everywhere in Tonga to participate in the prayer session. During the Queen's lifetime, she would be present at such an occasion.

In present-day Tonga, the Ako Tapu or Holy School is still prominent in the life of the church in Tonga. One of the annual functions that takes place during the Annual Conference of the Free Wesleyan Church is an annual Ako Tapu session during the morning hours of one day of the meeting. This session is attended by the Queen of Tonga and over a thousand women and men attend this early morning prayer session. In every village church in Tonga, there is an Ako Tapu prayer group meeting at least once a week. Some of the larger villages have more than one prayer group. In addition, the Church in general advocates for the existence of this prayer group.

The Significant Role of the Ako Tapu in the Church

It is my strong belief that the women of the church set the standard in the Tongan church. In a personal conversation with one of

⁶ Latu Silou, Conversation with author, 2004. Silou is one of the elders of the Holy School.

the retired ministers in the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga, he affirmed this belief in saying:

In this ministry, the minister's wife and the women of the church are always in the background. But in reality, it is the women who make our work easier. Where we have been successful in the life of the local church, it is the women who have been behind it. And in the life of the church, if the women unite and work together, without bickering and the likes, the church is made stronger, and more capable of accomplishing its goal.⁷

In view of the pivotal role that women play in the life of the church, it is even more important that the church caters to their spiritual nurturing. If the church is lax and does not provide the nurture and sustenance for women's spiritual life, the life of the church itself will falter. And this is why it is so critical to have programs such as the Ako Tapu or Holy School.

One of the advantages of this program is personal spiritual growth. It encourages women to spend personal and quiet time in prayer and biblical reflection. In the words of one of the devoted patronage, an 80-year woman who has been a Ako Tapu member for over 50 years:

It is unwise for anyone to expect to come to the Ako Tapu empty handed. She must come with something that she has gotten from her own spiritual walk that week, and she will make a contribution to the session. How can anyone expect to just come there and sit quietly without saying a single thing about the great love of God, and His grace which she has benefited from.⁸

⁷ Personal conversation, 2004, with Rev. Lopeti Taufa, retired minister and president for the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.

⁸ Personal conversation with Funaki Taufatofua, Ha'apai, Tonga, 2004. Taufatofua is one of the elder of the Holy School at the Ha'apai Group.

Indeed the dialogue that goes on during the Ako Tapu is one of thanksgiving and affirmation of God's love and grace. And although speaking up is not a mandatory part of being in the Ako Tapu but a woman is moved into speaking. The content of that dialogue is usually something that was gleaned from the biblical reference or a hymn. In short, being a member of this prayer group helps to encourage the women to "do their homework" by spending time in prayer and reflection in order that she might have the right thing to say at the right time in the prayer meeting.

Another advantage of this program is that it promotes communal accountability among the women. Traditionally women in Tonga have worked in the home. This work extended into other homes in the village as women worked together to accomplish the production of goods, or for other reasons. Production of goods was something they did well. But they also did what women usually do when they got together: talking and gossiping. And so womanly bickering was also a normal part of village life, and in turn, of the life of the church. Hence, it was even more important that the church provide some substantial way to counteract this reality.

In the life of the church, the Ako Tapu provides a concrete means of counteracting the everyday drudgery of life of women's life in the church. The Ako Tapu basically binds the women together in a tangible way. Because they are a part of this prayer group they are more

accountable to each other, in that they are reluctant to engage in bickering and fighting with women with whom they pray together in a covenant prayer group. Though disagreements may occur, the women are always conscious of the fact that this too would pass, and they would still have to face the same women again in their prayer circle. This sort of insight helped to maintain a state of peaceful existence, albeit hard at times.

In addition, the sharing between women of different generations that occurred in the Ako Tapu provided another important form of hindrance of any bickering and quarreling among the women. Not unlike many other Tongan arenas, the presence of the older and elderly women is highly valued. They are respected and their input is valued and heeded. As members of the Ako Tapu, they are on-hand to provide meaningful and practical guidance in matters that come up in the lives of the women. It is the older women who advise the younger women on the proper thing to do or not to do in a given situation. Their presence and their words often remind the younger members of the group that if there is a crisis, that too would pass, and the anger and the emotion will soon dissipate, but the personal relationships will still be there. One of the long-standing values in the lives of Tongan people are personal relationships, and people would go a long way to maintain those relationships. The elderly women of the village as keepers of all traditions, were quick to point to these values and underplay the

existence of any disagreement and crisis. Crisis that occur in the Tongan home or in the Tongan village are handled internally in the home. The Tongan concept of “*fofola e fala kae talanga e kainga*”, or “roll out the special mat so that everyone can talk” is the format for such intervention. There is an inherent understanding that respect and love within the *kainga* or family/extended family are an integral component of life that we are willing to do whatever it takes to keep this unit together. And so even if the dialogue turns sour and bitter, it is understood that nothing can break the bonds between the members who are all sitting down on the mat.

Another great advantage of the *Ako Tapu* is its communal nature. Instinctively, a woman who is a part of the *Ako Tapu* feels that she is only a part of a bigger realm. The communal prayer that takes place in this *Ako Tapu* reaffirms the notion that her world is interconnected and interwoven with other people and other things in this world.

A woman's life in Tonga is fairly predictable. In particular, a woman that grows up in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga knows what to expect in terms of her life in the church. The church, in general, has certain expectations of her which she rarely departs from, due to the intense social pressure that exists in the Tongan society. The migration across the vast sea has changed this reality.

In the next chapter, I will discuss that new “chapter” in the Tongan women's life, the life of an immigrant women in America.

CHAPTER 4

TONGAN WOMEN AS IMMIGRANTS IN THE NEW LAND

Reasons for Migration

The migration into the United States altered the world of the Tongan women. It is my belief that the chaotic condition that the Tongan women find themselves in has directly led to the downfall of the Tongan family here in the United States. In analyzing the reason for this downfall, its best to look at the reasons behind the migration.

For all its serenity and tranquility, Tonga does not have much to offer for the future of the younger generations in Tonga. Life in Tonga is supported by subsistence living, in which everyone grew and raised their own food and/or harvested the ocean for their food. Tonga's economy is agriculturally-based, with agricultural products accounting for more than 90% of its exports.¹ Other than tourism, there is no other major industry, and the economy, remains thwarted and threatened.

Tonga's education system also offers very limited possibilities for the future of the young generation of Tonga. With the exception of the Atenisi Institute, a self-styled university started by a Tongan native, Tonga lacks a post-secondary school system and only the elite have the opportunity to go oversea for a college-level education.

¹ Eckert, 14

Although many have been given the opportunity, masses of young men and women find themselves back in the villages, with no future other than what the generations of people before them had. Many young people, primarily, young men, roam the streets, with no proper profession to keep them busy and useful. It is not surprising then, that many people, particularly the commoner, began mass exit migration into oversea countries in search of a better life. Initially, Tongan migration headed to New Zealand, and then later to Australia. As stated earlier, rapid growth in migration into the United States did not occur until the late 1970's and the early 1980's. Many of these immigrants contend that the search for better education for their children is the primary reason for migration. Dr. Linita Manu'atu, a Tongan educator notes that "A large majority of *Tongan* people rank education highly as a 'reason' for leaving *Tonga*."²

Traditionally, wealth in Tonga is not based on cash-flow. Wealth was defined by a person's ability to perform his or her *fatongia* or duty in life of the community. For women, this meant that she had enough women's koloa (good or treasure) such as mats and tapas to do her duties of gift-giving in appropriate situations. For men, this meant that he had enough livestock and harvest to do his part in a given situation.³

² Linita Manu'atu, "Tuli ki he Ma'u Hono Ngaahi Malie: Pedagogical Possibilities for Tongan Students in New Zealand Secondary Schooling" (D. diss., University of Auckland, 2000), 1

³ Different occasions warrant a variety of *fatongia* or duty from both men and women. For instance, in a funeral, the men may be expected to bring a cow and a box of yams, while the women are expected to bring a 15 foot mat and some *tapa* cloth. This duty is all dependent on one's relation to the deceased.

In light of this system of wealth, Tonga may have meager economic resources, but it is not impoverished.

Notwithstanding the above reality, capitalism and other pervasive conditions such as globalization were beginning to make its presence felt in Tonga. Increasingly, people began to feel the lack of cash-flow in their lives. As a result, many began to feel the need to look for better financial means. Because opportunities were limited in Tonga, people began the quest of migration that would take many Tongans to foreign shores.

Leaving behind the tranquility and serenity of Tonga, these sojourners dreamed of a new land that would provide them with at least two identified goals: a better economic life, and a better future for their children to be guaranteed by better education for them. The reality of what they found, particularly here in Southern California, was a stark contrast from what they had envisioned.

An Immigrant's Life

The dreams of a better life quickly dissipated, as endless amounts of Tongans joined the universal struggle of a people in transition. Like many of their other counterparts, Tongans quickly realized that life in the capitalist leader of the world would be far from easy. Forgetting, the two-main objectives for their migration, many struggle to merely survive and keep their heads above the water of poverty here in the United States. Though there is a vast number of Tongan immigrants here in the

Southern California area, I will limit this discussion to the Tongans who are members of the United Methodist Church.

The California-Pacific Annual Conference (Cal-Pac) of the United Methodist Church has thirteen Tongan ministries in the Southern California area, with churches in as far north as Sun Valley, and as far south as San Diego. These thirteen churches are full members of the Conference. They may be involved in a bi-lingual ministry, but all of them are Tongan-language ministries. In addition to being a member of the Conference, these churches make-up the Tongan *Kuata*, which is an exclusively Tongan entity that facilitates programs and activities for all of the Tongan churches. There are thirteen more churches and/or ministries in Hawaii, which are also a part of the California-Pacific Annual Conference.⁴ All together the southern California Tongan churches have 657 families. Family here denotes a married couple who may or may not have any children. Further, some family may include extended family members, much as family life was in Tonga. According to church records, there is 1,397 adult membership, with 1,093 children and youth under the age of 18.⁵ To facilitate my purpose for this project, I concentrated on this group. I further propose that this sector of the Tongan American society is representative of the wider Tongan

⁴ At times, I will refer to the Tongan populations that make up these churches, but I will concentrate on the Southern California churches. My limited resources did not allow me to do any extensive research and investigation with the churches in Hawaii.

⁵ Quarterly report of the Tongan Kuata, 2004.

immigrant population and it offers a micro-image of what is going on with the wider Tongan-American society.

Research Methods and Findings

A large part of the information gathered came from questionnaires⁶ that were handed out during a Tongan Quarterly Meeting and at various churches throughout the Southern California

region of the California-Pacific Conference. At the women's quarterly gathering in September 2004, at which I happened to be leading the *Kaluseti* study, I had the opportunity to approach the women and asked them to assist me by answering the questionnaires. Ten of the thirteen ministries in the Cal-Pacific Conference were represented at the meeting. I explained briefly (and vaguely) that I was doing some research on Tongan women in the Church and their life of transition. I did not elaborate on the project, because I did not want them to tailor their answers in any particular way. All of the people present there were women. I then asked a representative from each of the ten churches that were represented there to take some of the questionnaires to their home church and pass them out and then return them to me. All of these representatives are personal friends of mine and I knew that I could trust them to assist me in this manner. Knowing the nature of the Tongan people to put things off if it required writing, I asked them to have the people do the questionnaires at church and return them promptly. I

⁶ A translated version of this questionnaire is included at the end of this project as an Appendix.

asked specifically that they give the questionnaire to both males and females in the church, but to ensure that, if possible, all of the women in the church fill out one. In addition, I personally gave out the questionnaires at four Tongan ministries, including the church that I am pastoring. At each of these churches, I gave the same short explanation and used the same process described above. Finally, in general, the questions that I posed attempted to shed some light on the reality of the Tongan people's lives and in particular, on the two-prong purposes that prompted them to leave Tonga and immigrate to the United States. To what extent have they realized their objectives of (1) seeking better economic and financial security, and (2) seeking better and higher education for their children? I intentionally used close-ended question, because it is my experience that Tongan people are an oral culture as opposed to writers, and they shy away from writing.

The findings gleaned from my initial research of this group provide a dark and gloomy picture on the life of Tongan immigrants. I gave out about 1000 questionnaires, and only 629, about 62% came back. Over 80% of this group engage in menial occupations. Most men are into the seasonal work of landscaping or yard work, with most of them working for other people, and a few owning their own small-business operation. Of those who did their own work, less than 5% had the proper licensing and government documents. The majority of the women interviewed are in the home-care business, or "live-in" job, where they are caring for a

person around the clock and away from home. Other jobs that Tongan women are taking are janitors, house cleaners, restaurant worker, and cashiers. Sixty three percent of the people interviewed said either they or their partner had more than one job in order to make ends meet. Only 2% of the people interviewed had a job that is considered to be in the professional field. Only 23% of the people interviewed owned their own home. The rest were either renting or were living with other family members.

As for the value of education, my discovery only confirmed my worst fears about the low priority that education has in the lives of Tongan immigrants. Although my data was a little unclear on this point, it seemed clear that graduating from high school was a major feat for a majority of this group. There are a lot of high school drop-outs in this group. Furthermore, only 2 out of 10 people went on to post-secondary schooling at either a community college level or four-year university. In the past five years, there have only been 14 university graduates from among this group. Graduate study is even more scarce, although I know personally of six people, out of the thirteen Tongan ministries, are enrolled in graduate study programs.

There are various reasons for this apparent lack of success in pursuing higher education among the Tongans. Unfortunately, written work on this issue is lacking. As of yet, no one has done a comprehensive study that can offer possible explanations regarding the

apparent lag in education for the Tongan. Due to my limited resource and my limited objective, the research that I conducted was not a comprehensive study from which I can draw some conclusions regarding these reasons. As mentioned earlier, I intentionally limited the questions to close-ended questions because I wanted to encourage as many people as possible to take part in the survey. But the reasons that I will be putting forth here come mostly from my personal observations in working with Tongan people here in the United States for the last ten years. In addition, I have had the good fortune of being among the people for the last ten years. More than just observation, I have had the opportunity to talk, eat, visit, work, attend family gatherings, and in general, I have gotten to know these people well. In addition, my Tongan colleagues and fellow ministers from all the thirteen Tongan ministries here in Southern California have offered their insights during informal and formal conversations (during meetings) regarding the issue of education among the Tongans.

From the outset, the primary reason seems to be a lack of direction in the young people's lives. The parents clearly want their children to pursue further education in order to ensure economic well-being for the future, and for the most part, this is also the young people's desire. However, there seems to be a lack of resource for the young people to draw from in order to further this desire. The parents, most of whom never graduated from High School, have nothing more to offer other than

their expressed desire for their children's future. The young people usually do not take a proactive role in approaching their future education, and many find themselves at the end of the senior year in high school having failed to take the proper college entry tests and to submit appropriate college admission application. Lack of resources such as counseling and mentoring are very apparent in the Tongan society.

In addition there is also a tendency among the 1st generation Tongans to have short sighted goals with regards to education and employment. As a result, once the young person has completed a year or two of college, and she finds a "well-paying" job, she is encouraged to pursue her employment, rather than her education. As young people become more interested in acquiring material goods such as cars, clothing, etc., they have a tendency to work in order to support their life style, rather than go to school and invest in their future. Furthermore, some families have such pressing economic needs, that they need their young people to work and contribute to the family source of support, rather than go to college.

Finally, the academic element of competence may be an issue in a young person's ability to succeed in higher education. Accordingly, such factors as English as a second language may be a hindrance. Ultimately the Tongan young people can overcome these hindrances if they have

appropriate resources such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling and advise.

In light of the above statistics, it is clear that this group of Tongan immigrants have not achieved the two-fold goals that they set out to achieve. Undoubtedly, these Tongans could not avoid the universal hardships that characterize the lives of every immigrant society, and that may have a direct impact on their current state. Notwithstanding that, I contend that as a people in transition, there are practical considerations and alternatives that can bring about a different result in the lives of this group of people. These considerations and alternatives are grounded on what Tongan women are charged with, as “keeper of the home.” But before we can look at some possibilities of alleviating the harsh effect of migration, we need to take a serious look at the current state of the women’s lives in southern California.

Leaving Tonga, these migrant women had a clear perception of what their goals are, in most cases, the two-fold goals of finding better economic life, and finding a better future for their children through education. Once they arrived in this country, the goals did not seem so clear anymore. The United States offered a stark contrast to their former home. The United States is the land of plenty, and the more you acquire, the more you want. Most Tongan families fell into this trap. It seemed all of a sudden that the sky is the limit with how much possession one can acquire. And so people got into whatever jobs they could find, in

order to get some sort of remuneration, so that they could get the things they *want* to get. Many end up with two or more jobs, just so they could support their habit of spending. It is ironic, that at a typical quarterly meeting of the 13 Tongan churches and ministries, the cars that are parked in the parking lot could very well belong to a group of middle-class people. In addition, the clothing worn by the women in particular are quite exquisite and probably very expensive.

Another source of great financial loss is the maintenance of the Tongan traditional system of celebration here in the United States. Weddings, birthday parties, and funerals remain great *kavenga* or obligatory acts, as they were in Tonga. However, the major difference here is that once again the sky is the limit when it comes to celebration, the Tongan way. For example, the norm in Tonga for a 21st birthday party, a great traditional cause for celebration, would be for the family sponsoring the party to get a birthday cake of about 3 or 4 tier. As is the traditional manner, the cakes are given away to people of honor in relation to the birthday girl or boy, and the cakes must be presented with some *koloa* (women's goods or treasure). Hence in Tonga the first cake traditionally goes to the girl's *fahu* or the sister of her father, who is in the highest position of honor with regards to the girl. This cake may be presented with a 15 feet mat, and a 10 feet *tapa* cloth and some other *koloa*. Here in Southern California, things have changed. A standard 21st birthday here would warrant 21 cakes, and enough *koloa* or goods

and treasures to be presented with each of those cakes. Concurrently, the amount of *koloa* (goods, treasure) given to each person of honor has gone up, so that the aunt receiving the first cake may receive a 30 feet mat, and a 50 feet *tapa*, and a ton of other *koloa*. It is not unusual for birthday parties of this magnitude to cost over \$20,000.00 when everything is taken into account.⁷ Weddings and funerals warrant the same kind of gift giving or showing, and so those occasions can be very expensive as well.

Among these immigrant women, there seem to be a desire to move up on the social ladder as they knew them in Tonga. The vast opportunities of the New World hold less appeal for them, as they yearn

to capture the fleeting aspirations of island life. The old island adage rings true here; “you can take the body out of the island, but you can’t take the island out of the body.” The Tongans say that someone who is involved in this is *fie ma`olunga* or “one who wants to be high.” This is a common Tonga phraseology, indicating how prevalent this condition is. Concurrently, the notion of competition is also very much alive in the world of these immigrants. There is a real tendency by some to always outdo the other person, so that if one gets a brand new car, the next person would get a more expensive car. Living in a small place like

⁷ This amount may include not just the food, venue, entertainment, but also the woman’s *koloa* or goods and treasure which can be mass-produced in Tonga and shipped to the United States. The cost of a 50 by 15 *tapa* is about \$1,000, and the cost of a 20 by 10 foot mat is about \$500. In a big birthday party, there may be 15 to 20 mats, *tapa*, and a host of other *koloa*.

Tonga has what I call the fish in a fish tank effect; everyone knows what the other person is doing. But in Tonga, the social ranking and order that applied in village life kept everything in status quo. In-fact, it was considered ill mannered and unacceptable for one in a lower social ranking to try and emulate the actions of one who was higher in rank.⁸ With that feudal system gone, we now have people that attempt to move up on the social ladder by having possessions that may be beyond their economic means but they deem fit for “high class” people. In addition, they hold big and grand functions that seemingly attest to their newly gained social elevation. It seems indeed that for the Tongan immigrants, money is the great equalizer.

Many Tongans find themselves inside a vicious cycle that never seems to end. They are forced to work long hours to support the way of life that they have chosen for themselves. These jobs offer no upward mobility either through training or education. Despite the lack of incentive in these jobs, they are forced to remain there in order to get the money they need. This is true with yard work, domestic work, and home-care work. In addition, many parents have neglected their parental duties and obligations in their race to make money. Admittedly, many Tongan families are in dire financial needs and the long hours of work are absolutely necessary to make ends meet in this new world.

⁸ Eckert, 14.

But there are also many more Tongan immigrants who work long hours in order to support the grand life-style that they have chosen for themselves in this new country.

Interpreting the Current Crisis in Tongan Women's Lives

The migration to the United States has effectively shifted the Tongan women's life. As established above, she is thoroughly disoriented and having found new priorities and aspirations, she has abandoned her traditional role as "keeper of the home." In keeping with that role, her primary duty was, first and foremost, raising her children, and ensuring their moral well-being. In the New land, the priorities have changed. Raising the children may still be an important consideration, but it is no longer priority number one. The new priority is making money. And as mentioned earlier, there may be a legitimate family need that necessitates the mother working, but for the most part, it is the change in life style that dictates the new priority in the family.

The effects of the change of priority from being the "keeper of the home" to making and earning money are clearly apparent in the life of the Tongan family. The mother is taken away from raising the children. She now works long hours or works away from home, as in live-in jobs. The children are left by themselves or with care-takers, who make no personal investment in their lives. And even when the caretakers genuinely take an interest in the children's lives, as in grandparents, they may not have the energy to offer appropriate guidelines for the

children. The neglect of the children in this manner effectively severs the mother/parent, child relationship and the mother basically loses her authority as a mother. Thus begins the vicious downward spiraling in the total well-being of the family: the child rebels against the parent and against their wishes for a better life and better education. The mother, seeing that she is not very effective as an authority figure, basically gives up on her role as a nurturing mother and concentrates on making and earning money. In-fact, for many women it is easier for them to endure the long hours and the hard circumstances of the work place than to endure the emotional and psychological burden of raising children in this new land.

Admittedly, the job of raising children was more easily achieved in Tonga where the outside society had an active role in nurturing young people. Such things as the communal, village life where everyone knew each other, the neighborhood church family, the traditional Tongan way of living that dictates obedience on the part of the children, and the existence of a societal hierarchy that promotes orderliness, are things that were traditionally a part of the social fabric in Tonga, but are now missing in the United States. Here in the new land, the strong and destructive forces of the mass media, consumerism, gangs, drugs, and other signs of societal decay take the place of those nurturing elements that were present in the fabric of the society in Tonga. In light of that, one can understand why it is that the Tongan mother has hopelessly

given up on her role of molding her children's character. In her eyes, it seems almost impossible to do this. And it is precisely this sense of helplessness and hopelessness that this projects seeks to address by helping the Tongan women to understand and cope in her new environment. To start, we must intentionally address the spiritual impairment that is apparent in the Tongan women's lives.

The change of priority greatly hinders the Tongan woman's spiritual life. In Tonga, her spiritual practices and discipline enabled her to maintain and sustain her role as "keeper of the home." In the new land, there is no room for the spiritual practices that the women were accustomed to in Tonga. The new priority of making money is a tyranny that demands more and more of a woman's time. She no longer has time to participate in the spiritual practices that nurtured her back in Tonga and enabled her to do her duties as a mother and "keeper of the home." This, in my view, is the greatest mistake that the Tongan women can make. In so doing, she has "cut off the very hands that feed her." She has effectively disconnected herself from the very source of life, from the God who ministers to all our most intimate and dire needs.

Another effect of the changing life of the Tongan women is the change of emphasis from a communal life that was based on the welfare of the communal unit, to an emphasis on the individual. This can be seen in the lifestyles of the Tongan women. Women earn more and more

money to get more and more things for herself, and her immediate family.

In addition to a Tongan woman's discretionary choice of life style, there is an urgency for money that exists in this new land that was not present in Tonga. In Tonga the communal nature of life meant that people did not have to worry so much about not having the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, or clothing. If one did not have what he/she needed, they could always count on someone else in the community to provide those needs. As a result, it was not economically necessary for the women to work and earn money, and consequently, she could focus all her attention on her traditional role of tending to the social and emotional well being of the family. Here in the new land, if one does not provide the basic necessities for one's family, there is no communal system to step in and provide.

Chapter 5

THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In this chapter, I will explore existing works in the field of Religious Education, constructive theology and multicultural studies. I will look at a variety of bodies of work in these fields with an eye toward developing an appropriate Religious Education approach that will intentionally minister to the specific needs of the Tongan immigrant women. These needs are: (1) setting appropriate priorities for one's time and resources; (2) reassessing the reasons for migration to the new land; (3) reclaiming the spiritual practices that have customarily nurtured the Tongan women; and (4) setting appropriate goals and visions for the future. I have intentionally chosen to concentrate on the field of Religious Education because religious education is the primary tool that can be used to overcome the social cultural crisis that I have covered in the foregoing pages. Additionally, works from the field of constructive or systematic theology will have the effect of informing my own process of thinking and formation of a Religious Education approach. Finally, I cannot overlook works done in multiculturalism because the work of spiritual formation that I am attempting does not happen in a vacuum, but rather it will occur within the context of present day southern California, where there is no longer an ethnic majority. It is the world of multiculturalism. The works in the field of multicultural will help to inform the process of building a proper Religious Education approach for

Tongan women immigrant. Finally, the work that I will be covering in the next few pages is certainly not meant to be a thorough and exhaustive representation of works in this field. Rather, I have selected these resources because they relate to the Christian Education project that I will be proposing in the next chapter.

In a world of transition, the Church remains as one of the few constant social structures found in both the new and old world. In this context, I will define church as Susanne Johnson defined it in her book, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom, “as the people of God”¹ or the “congregation of those called to be a sign of the world God wills.”² In their new world, the church becomes much more than just a place of worship for the Tongan immigrants. It becomes the center of life in which all meaningful social, cultural, and spiritual events take place. For a people whose lives are characterized by great hardship, the church becomes a place of refuge. Professor Jung Young Lee could not be more right in saying that “[t]he church is the community of God’s marginal people.”³ The church takes on an even more meaningful role in the lives of immigrant people, because that is one of the few places that they feel at home. In a sense, the Church has become the meeting place or “space” of the old and the new, creating yet another level of reality for

¹ Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 70.

² Susanne Johnson, 71.

³ Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 121.

these people in transition. The Church thus becomes what Hispanic/Latina theologians call the “borderland.”⁴ But herein lies greater challenge for the immigrant church: the church must be able to minister to the myriad of needs that fill the lives of immigrants in their current reality.

Indeed the Church plays a multivalent role in the lives of immigrant Tongans. We cannot change nor control the social, political and cultural forces that give rise to the reality of the Church being many and different things to these immigrant people. But we must ensure that the Church achieves its primary and destined role, which is to ensure that the people become the body of God. As such it is as proposed by Maria Harris a “people with a pastoral vocation.”⁵ Maria Harris goes on further to define what that “pastoral call” is:

The pastoral vocation, as the phrase suggests, is a call to, and demand for, a particular way of living. The particularity can be summed up in the word “pastoral,” which implies a caring for, and a relationship to, persons, and an active and practical engagement in the work of Christian ministry. We are called to care for ourselves, for one another, for the earth which is our home. We are called to take seriously our relation to God and to all God’s creatures, both within and beyond the church. We are called to end our isolation from others by living each day of our lives rooted in love, rooted in the Christ. And we are called to believe that in doing so, we fulfill our destiny as a people of God.⁶

⁴ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier et al., A Many Colored Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2004), 12, n.18.

⁵ Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 23.

⁶ Harris, 24.

Religious Education is perhaps the primary tool for answering the Church's "pastoral call." But perhaps it would be best to get a clear understanding of what is "Religious Education?" *Education* has been defined as the "deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities."⁷ When consulting the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms for a definition of *religious education*, it directs the reader to the terms *Christian Education* which it defines as, "the education and formation of persons in the Christian church in all areas of life in light of the Christian faith."⁸ Barbara Wilkerson suggests that *religious education* is "education for knowing, valuing, and living one's religion..."⁹ I would add that it is the learning and the practicing of sacred discipline and practices that maintain and nurture one's spirituality and thereby empower one to live a more abundant life. For the purpose of this paper, Christian religious education, and religious education may be used interchangeably at times.

The Church must be in the business of helping people to develop a relationship with God. The all encompassing truth of Christian discipleship is that people need to be in relationship with God. It is this most fundamental existence that ultimately determines the course of

⁷ Lawrence A. Cremin, American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), x, cited in Barbara Wilkerson, ed., Introduction to Multicultural Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1997), 3, n. 6.

⁸ Donald K. McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 47.

⁹ Barbara Wilkerson, Introduction to Multicultural Religious Education, 3.

one's life. All other relationship is hitherto dependent on one's relationship with God. Faith in God is nothing more than a relationship with God. This notion is consistent with Daniel O. Aleshire's description of faith in his book Faith Care:

Another way of describing the purpose of faith is to conceive of it as the means by which people become related to God. Faith involves a person's ability to perceive God's initiative in his or her life and the intentional response the individual makes to that initiative.¹⁰

In speaking about faith, Asian theologians' keen perception on faith is relevant for discussion in the Tongan context. Faith in the Asian context, according to David Ng, is a concept that does not lend itself easily to a theological definition. Rather, faith is a fluid element of everyday life, as played out in the *stories* of everyday living in the Asian society. David Ng, in his introduction to the book, People on the Way, offers a description of faith that is keenly relevant for life of the Tongan immigrants:

This is not to say that Asian North American Christians do not have faith; that they have. But faith often is known as a way, a path that is traveled and is still being explored. There is a goal, but it is yet to be reached. It is hard to write an abstract exposition of a faith that is a journey or of believers who are sojourners.¹¹

Like her Asian counterparts, Keiti Ann Kanongata`a, a Tongan/Pacific Islander theologian draws on women's *stories* and

¹⁰ Daniel O. Aleshire, Faith Care, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 42.

¹¹ David Ng, xxviii.

experiences in attempting to construct an appropriate theology for Pacific Island women:

...their stories of “days gone by,” of today, and their dream-stories for the future...It has been a moving picture of life experiences – of their happiness, their sorrows, their land, their relationships, their food, their clans, their cultures, and so forth. Our stories are ourselves!¹²

But the stories are not to be an end unto itself. Kanongata`a proposes that the women need to “read more into our stories and to discover how they become the raw material for a women’s theology.” She suggests the image of *birthing* as an appropriate metaphor for the emergence of a new Pacific island theology:

Our stories tell of our traditional life in the past, which is still part of our present. It is likened to a life in the womb. There is life and potential for growth, as well as security and warmth. But life in the womb is also characterized by confinement and limitation. Our world has been a small one, a village on an island. The traditional practices, the cultural taboos, the technical know-how, the social bondings and social activities or responsibilities – all of these have been part of the “womb” experience. ...Today we are in the process of birthing. To stay forever in the womb would be fatal.”¹³

Using women’s experience and stories as basis for theological reflection is an effective educational methodology, as proposed by Mary Elizabeth Moore in her book Teaching from the Heart.¹⁴ In-fact, the thematic imagery of birthing is proposed by Moore in her own terms of *midwife teaching*.¹⁵ In her book, Moore argues for *organic*

¹² Kanongata`a, 195.

¹³ Kanongata`a, 195-96.

¹⁴ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, Teaching from the Heart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Moore, 27.

teaching, in which people are made to realize that they are “connected with themselves, with one another, with social systems, with the earth, and with transcended reality.”¹⁶ Moore’s approach is fitting for the Tongan context in which traditional life consists of an interrelated web of relationships and obligations flowing to and from each other. One’s faith life is played out within the context of that web of relationships.

Moore’s disposition is consistent with the life-mapping activity that is one of the underlying teaching tools used in this project.¹⁷ This working tool engages the participant in a process of reflection and recounting and documenting the content of such reflection and recollection. This process of “mapping” will provide a comprehensive picture of this web of relationships and responsibilities that are an integral part of a Tongan woman’s life. In addition, the practice of *fofola e fala kae talanga e kainga* or dialogue that binds the group together, will also bring about this concept of *organic teaching*.

Whether we perceive faith as a *relationship* or a *journey*, authentic faith must be nourished. In light of the magnitude of this task, Christian or religious education is indispensable in the life of the church. Randolph Crump Miller, in his book, The Theory of Christian Education Practice, is instructive in stating that:

¹⁶ Moore, 2.

¹⁷ This approach came from a spiritual growth retreat that was sponsored by the California-Pacific United Methodist Women, which I attended

The purpose of Christian Education is to place God at the center and to bring the individual into the right relationship with God and one's fellows within the perspective of the fundamental truths about all of life. The major task for Christian Education is to discover and impart the relevance of Christian truth. The key words are relationship and relevance.¹⁸

Nourishing one's relationship with God is one of the Church's fundamental roles. But this work must be an intentional process in which the development of the individual is taken into account, so that the church's ministry can more directly respond to the present need. As Daniel O. Aleshire points out, "[a]ttending to human development can become a valuable resource for ministry."¹⁹ For the purpose of this project, I concur with Aleshire's definition of human development "as a function of internal psychological tendencies and external environmental contexts and reinforcements."²⁰ This process is most critical in the lives of an immigrant church population where so many other forces determine the present condition of the people. So many external social, political and cultural factors determine the reality of immigrant people's lives. Daniel O. Aleshire, is on point in stating that:

To the extent that developmental process determines some events, ministry must find ways to deal with people who are controlled by forces beyond the realm of the church and its people to influence. Ministry becomes a means of helping people deal with the consequences of the unavoidable.²¹

¹⁸ Randolph Crump Miller, The Theory of Christian Education Practice (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980), 156

¹⁹ Aleshire, 83.

²⁰ Aleshire, 82.

²¹ Aleshire, 84.

Additionally, one's relationship with God necessarily entails a two-way relationship with the Church. This truth speaks to the fact that one who proclaims to be "Christian" is by definition one who is a member of a faith community. Being an active member of the church necessarily means being an active *participant* in the life of the church. Susanne Johnson is informative on the meaning of participation:

We are formed as Christians by engaging with the church in certain tangible, communal, personal, and difficult practices. They are the actual things we do attitudinally, bodily, and repeatedly, as basic to becoming Christian. To engage in those practices together *is* to engage in spiritual discipline, *is* to participate in God's Realm, *is* to become Christian, and *is* to be the church together.²²

In short, there is no Christian growth, without participation. We participate not merely because the church needs us, but more importantly because it is in participation that we develop as Christians. "Our vocation, in terms of covenant faith, is to participate in the most fully conscious way we can in the triune life of God, whatever our job or profession may be."²³

Participation will lead to another necessary step in Christian growth: theological reflection. In particular, for an immigrant population, there must be some medium in which a person enters into a mode of inventory in which he/she takes the time and effort to review and account for one's status, emotionally, psychologically, and

²² Johnson, 55.

²³ Johnson, 61.

spiritually. It is this act that will proactively move the person into appropriate action. This is a necessary step if one is to be transformed and rise above the crisis discussed earlier in this paper. Aleshire points to the appropriateness of reflection in his book Faith Care.

When life provides the agenda for theology, theology ceases to be more formal propositional thought and becomes the individual's attempt to interpret the rhythms of life in the presence of God. The theology a person constructs will carve a far deeper pattern into that individual's faith than will propositions received and affirmed.²⁴

But for true transformation to occur, reflection alone is not enough. It must be coupled with action within the context of dialogue. Indeed, Paulo Freire's classic call for praxis or the sum result of action and reflection should be heeded as we attempt to find a medium that will allow for transformation. In Paulo Freire's words, "[h]uman beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection."²⁵ Dialogue is the medium that can unite everyone in the common search for meaning in life. The giving and taking that is available through dialogue becomes a necessary therapeutic means in a life that is characterized by hardship and few successes. But it is in the everyday stories of life, shared through dialogue, that people can find hope and meaning. And in the Asian context, Asian theologian C. S. Song illustratively notes this point: "Doing theology with folktales in Asia teaches an important

²⁴ Aleshire, 163.

²⁵ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 36th Ann. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2003), 88.

lesson: stories of people, not preconceived theological ideas and criteria, lead us to deeper truths about humanity and God.”²⁶

C. S. Song’s emphasis on “stories of people” is consistent with the Tongan people’s oral tradition and culture. The Tongan people have communicated information from generation to generation through the oral medium of story telling, poems, and music. Storytelling is an empowering teaching tool because every participant is able to share in the telling. Telling one’s story is a validating experience. The Tongan women have a natural tendency for telling stories. In light of that, I will be utilizing the mode of storytelling for my Religious Education project.

Finally, the strength of any religious education program is inherently related to how much prayer is done for and as a part of the program. In Maria Harris’s word, “We are educated to prayer and, we are educated by prayer.”²⁷ For my purposes, the value of personal prayer cannot be overstated, and indeed “[w]e are educated by the time we spend alone in the company of the Divine.”²⁸ But it is the strength of corporate prayer that I want to emphasize here. Again, Harris is instructive on the need for corporate prayer in saying that “we need to experience them (prayer) by engaging in prayer with others. The curriculum is in the praying”.²⁹ To use Harris’s definition, corporate

²⁶ Choan-Seng Song, Third-eye Theology, rev. ed.(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 11, cited in David Ng, xxviii.

²⁷ Harris, 95.

²⁸ Harris, 96.

²⁹ Harris, 98

prayer is “prayer where the agent is not us individually but us as a praying community.”³⁰ I would add that corporate prayer is prayer in which the community collectively enters into prayer. This collective prayer may be in public, unison form or may be in public, meditative and silent form. As an avid practitioner of this form of prayer, I could not agree more with Harris on the significance of this form of prayer:

On one hand, this is a support personally in the dry times when we experience no relation with God at all – times when we must depend on the strength and fidelity of our companions to buoy us up and strengthen us. It is even a support in the green times, where we need the discipline of a group commitment. But most of all, corporate prayer is the form we need to create and re-create our identity as a people, for leiturgia is at root “the people at prayer.”³¹

I would add, that in times of need or in Harris’s word “dry times,” it is more than the “strength and fidelity” of others that enable us to move forward, but it is the actual act of collective praying that empowers us to move beyond the “dry times.” This time of collective prayer in the Tongan context is almost always characterized by spirited loud speaking, cries, and emotions in prayer, while others sing quietly. Undoubtedly, the simultaneous praying of others, both unison and silent, play a crucial role in buoying one out of one’s spiritual “dry times.” It’s as if the practice itself ministers to us, and while in the act of collective prayer, we *remember* it is through the grace of God, that we have the strength that

³⁰ Harris 98

³¹ Harris, 98.

is needed to overcome. The collective prayers of the people become a teaching tool for the participant, where one moves from one plateau of learning to another. It is as Harris puts it, *the curriculum is in the praying*.

The Spiritual Growth Retreat

I will end this project by presenting a proposal for a spiritual growth retreat. In terms of educational theories, this retreat will bear heavily on the notion that the Tongan women must actively participate in the process that ultimately forms and reforms her spiritual bearings in this new surrounding. This model is in large part based on the assumption that we live in a world in which everything is related to everything else. The retreat is heavily based on this relational theory. The making of the present is directly related to the things of the past. The choices we make today will in large part shape our future and the future of our children. Our economic life is inherently related to our personal lives. In the course of the retreat, through utilization of various methods and tools, such as narratives and storytelling, the participants will attempt to better understand these relational factors in their lives and configure a meaningful and spiritual approach to their life in their new surroundings. It will be a time of reflection on these factors but more importantly, it will be time in which they will be urged into transformational actions.

Transformational work is more easily achieved in group settings. Perhaps the biblical admonishment that “two are better than one...for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion,”³² provides the best support for the effectiveness of group settings. There is an invincible bond that ties members of a group together whose primary object is seeking to be aligned with God’s will in this world. Susanne Johnson provides some basic guidelines on the appropriate elements of a group: “(1) practicing together the spiritual disciplines, (2) learning to make God’s Realm concrete in our daily lives (praxis), (3) training in the various lay ministries of the church and in realizing Christian vocation, and (4) investigating the length and breadth of the Christian Story.”³³ The level of personal intimacy that group setting allows provides a ripe environment for growth and learning from each other. Additionally, each member is accountable to each other, as they are loved and cherished within the group.

Storytelling is an important tool in my retreat model, because the stories are *organic*, to use Mary Elizabeth Moore’s term, elements that form the basis for the Tongan women’s theological journey. The retreat model effectively utilizes Susan M. Shaw’s approach, “storytelling as a structured experience.”

A structured experience is an inductive learning activity through which learners create meanings and knowledge

³² Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, NRSV.

³³ Susanne Johnson, Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1989), 127.

within a community context. In a structured experience, learners engage in an activity, look back on the activity critically, abstract some useful insights from the analysis, and put the results to work through a change in behavior.³⁴

Finally, Maria Harris views the retreat methodology as corporate prayer, or a prayer retreat where for a stated amount of time a group or a community removes itself from its normal setting in order to concentrate on the stated objective of praying. “The curriculum of a retreat is that a group of people come together to pray – and to be educated to prayer, by prayer, and in prayer.”³⁵ In addition, a retreat is an ideal time in which we reflect on our own journey and how God works with us in that journey. But it is not an end to itself. Rather, it is a time apart for spiritual rejuvenation so that we are better Christians, better able to live as Christians in this world. In retreat, we nurture ourselves so that we can be better disciples of Christ. Together, the group nurtures each other in prayer, study and re-commitment to God. This commitment is a redefinition of the actions in our lives as rhythms of life that are in line with the will of God. In coming to them we discern between actions that bring true life to us and actions that feed the values of a consumerist society.

The theology of the relational and participatory educational theories set forth above necessarily draws from a *relational* theology and

³⁴ Susan M. Shaw, Storytelling in Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999), 135.

³⁵ Harris, 100.

a narrative theology. The basic assumptions here is that life and living do not occur in a vacuum, but that all things are related to each other and it is the *stories* of *all things* that form the basis for theology. Seeking and finding God within this context is a fitting theological concept for the Tongan person because her own existence and life as she knows it are a part of a bigger web of interrelated unit. This proposed theology is an attempt to personalize theology for the women, and thereby render it more authentic and real. It is as Mary Elizabeth Moore suggests in her book, "The other dream is for the art of theology to be practiced in such an organic way that theological reflection touches and connects all dimensions of life."³⁶

³⁶ Moore, 2.

CHAPTER 6

KOE FEFINE TONGA: RENEWING AND RECLAIMING OUR SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual Growth Retreat

A Statement of Purpose and Objectives

A spiritual growth retreat designed for Tongan United Methodist women to increase the understanding of and commitment to God. In particular, we will reexamine the Tongan women's traditional identity and her spiritual walk with God. We will also examine the Tongan woman's life as an immigrant in this New land. Specifically, we will attempt to reorient the women's understanding in an effort to help them overcome the sense of disorientation that immigrating has created. Having lost the social system that supported and promoted her roles of being the "keeper of the home" in Tonga coupled with the change of priorities brought about by a desire to imitate a life of capitalism and consumerism, the Tongan women exist in a state of great perplexity. In such a state, she abandons her traditional roles of molding the character and well-being of her children and her family, and this has contributed to the deterioration of the Tongan family unit in America. In addition, the Tongan women's change of priority has resulted in her abandoning the spiritual practices that sustained her role as a women in Tonga. We will explore ways of reclaiming those spiritual practices. The retreat will utilize various religious educational tools and traditional Tongan

religious educational tools to assist the participants's spiritual development and search for re-stabilizing their lives in a new environment. Some of these religious education tools include C. S. Song's and Keiti Kanongata'a's story approach, Maria Harris's retreat methodology as corporate prayer, Susanna Johnson's use of group practices, Elizabeth Moore's call for "organic teaching" through the use of life-mapping and Paulo Freire's classic call for praxis or the sum result of action and reflection. Some of the Tongan religious tools that will be utilized are oral mediums such as singing, story telling, dialogue and sharing as in "*fofola e fala ka e talanga* ," *tali ui* or roll calling, prayer in the form of individual prayer, and corporate, unison prayer as in *the tali lotu* and *ako tapu* session. Throughout the retreat program, theological reflections will be critical in the women's attempt to find their spiritual bearing in their new surrounding. The end result of this retreat is for the participant to produce a list of resolutions in tangible action form, that can help women grapple with the reality of disorientation in a new land and provide transformation.

Overview

Session 1 – Opening Worship

The over-all goal of this opening worship is to provide the appropriate space and setting to enabled encourage the women to open their hearts and receive God's love and care during this weekend.

To achieve this goal, there are several objectives that will be addressed in this session:

1. To create a familiar setting where they feel at home. To achieve this, I will utilize the Tongan oral medium of singing prior to the beginning of the service and during the service, and reciting of the hymn and bible verse by participants. Community Building time using the religious education and traditional Tongan tool of storytelling will also be used here, as it will help to create a feeling of familiarity and comradeship among the participants.
2. Affirm and celebrate the women's life and their presence at the retreat. I will encourage the participants to celebrate affirm their names by using the tool of storytelling about one's given name. In addition the roll calling or *tali ui* session will provide another opportunity for self-affirmation.
3. Encourage the participant to personally relate to God early on in the retreat, and thereby find her own spiritual bearing. This is important, as this is the act that will initiate the learning and healing process for the women this weekend. She must find within herself a spiritual yearning. To accomplish this goal, I will utilize the religious educational tool of corporate prayer of *tali lotu* in the Tongan tradition. This will be a great time for the women to find their spiritual

identity or in Harris' words, "to recreate and create our identity as a people, for leiturgia is at root "the people at prayer."¹ And later on in the session, a time for *tali ui* or roll calling will provide the participant with a time of personal inventory and affirmation, as she responds to God's call at this particular time in her life.

Session 2: Town Meeting – My Life as an Immigrant Women

The over-all goal of this session is coming to terms with one's life as an immigrant woman and understanding what are the challenges, disadvantageous, loss, advantageous and gains that this new life has to offer. This is an attempt to find the participant's social bearing in this new land.

To achieve this goal, there are several objectives that will be addressed in this session:

1. The participants must feel comfortable enough to open up and share. To do this, I will provide an appropriate setting such as having everyone sit on the *fala* or mat. Again, this will have the effect of reminding them of their origin. In addition, having everyone on the floor has the effect of equalizing all the participants so that each will feel that they are on equal footing, and each one's story is similarly valued.

¹ Harris, 98.

2. The participants must be honest. The religious education tool of storytelling will be an ideal format for sharing because it is a way of informal, personal sharing that most of the participants have engaged in since childhood. It is easier to be honest when one is comfortable and familiar with the mode of communication.
3. The participants' must be united. The process of storytelling will help to achieve this. Through the storytelling, the women will recognize how they are all united by the same pain and suffering. They will begin to counteract the reality of disconnectedness in their lives.
4. The participants need to be engaged in recognizing the existing problems and formulating some solutions for those problems. To this end, I will utilize Paulo Freire's method of empowerment of the participants. Freire's method calls for problem-solving by using groups and appropriate themes.
5. Ensure that everyone shares in the problem-solving process. I will use Susanne Johnson's group approach to ensure that appropriate sharing occurs in smaller groups as opposed to keeping everyone together.

Session 3: Reflection and Life-Mapping Activity

The overall goal of this session is for the participants to be able to engage in self-appraisal and document their spiritual journey and their immigration journey and find how those paths relate to each other.

I will achieve this goal by addressing the following objectives during this session:

1. The participants must engage in honest, spiritual self-appraisal. I will utilize the tool of reflection to achieve this.
2. The participants must document their process of self-appraisal. I will utilize the tool of life-mapping to achieve this end. As part of this work, I have included a variety of questions and form of presentations to allow for maximum creativity from the participants.

Session 4: Town Meeting 2 – Journeying with God in a New land

The overall goal of this session is to find some tangible methods that will enable the participants to journey with God in this new land.

To attain the above goal, I will address the following objectives during this session:

1. The participants need to be comfortable enough to share. I will help to create this by using the town meeting, open dialogue approach of meeting and sharing on the mats.

2. The participants need to come up with 10 tangible methods that will help them overcome the problems discussed in the other sessions and journey with God in this new land. To achieve this, I will utilize once again Freire's call for praxis.
3. The methods need to come out of the participant's town hall meeting. I will achieve this by using Keiti Kanongata's approach of birthing. Additionally, I will ensure that the participant's understand Elizabeth Moore's approach of "organic teaching" which will allow empower them in knowing that the elements that came out of their stories, their lives, are the very elements that will make up their education in this matter.

Session 5: Ako Tapu or Holy School

The goal here is to reclaim one of the integral spiritual disciplines or practice that sustained women's lives in Tonga and encourages the women to participate in this powerful experience.

To attain the above goal, I will be addressing the following objectives:

1. The participants need to participate. I will encourage participation, by offering Susanne Johnson's call for the need to engage in the tangible and communal practices of the Church.
2. The participants need to experience this meaningful and powerful form of prayer. Once again, this tool offers all the

Tongan traditional elements of communal and corporate singing and praying.

3. Walking with God requires that one engage in practices that nourishes one's spirituality. The Ako Tapu offers such nourishment.

Session 6: Closing Service of Commitment

Here the goal and objectives are for the women to participate in a serve of commitment in which they commit themselves to the Ten Principles that they have formulated.

It is my hope that I will be able to promote this retreat through the Tongan United Methodist Church here in the United States. Although the immediate subject group is made up of the thirteen Tongan ministries here in the Southern California area, I am hopeful that I can branch –out to other Tongan United Methodist Church communities in the United States. Additionally, the retreat is meant to be a one time retreat for Tongan women. But I will be inclined to develop further resources that can follow-up after a woman completes the retreat. It is essential that the retreat is not the last step in this journey. I will provide further resources that will ensure that an on-going dialogue continues, which may in turn, lead to further actions in the future.

- A worship center will include a cross, candles, and some traditional Tongan material, such as a tapa or a coconut cup.

It is critical that the worship center reflects the joining together of two worlds. The setting speaks to the reality of the women's world, and the hope that we can create a world where elements from the Tongan women's ethnic identity combine with elements from her new world work together to create a beautiful setting.

- Begin each session with acapella free style singing of Tongan hymns and songs.

This type of traditional Tongan singing is called "*hiva tali lotu*" or singing while awaiting prayer time. It is often referred to as a time of "ui ui kelesi," or inviting or calling the Spirit and the grace of God to be present in the program that is about to start. It is a critical part of the any program, including worship time. It usually starts out about 30 minutes before the program starts. There is no programmed item for this part of the program. It entails only a handful of people to start the singing in which one person, usually a designated *pulotu* (one who starts the singing) will start one song or hymn. At the conclusion of that song, another song or hymn is started after a few minutes break. It is important to keep the singing going.

- The number of participants should be limited to no more than 30 to 32 women.

The group setting is important. In particular, the Tongans are traditionally, communal people, as opposed to individualists. It is important that the learning and re-learning take place within an

atmosphere in which one is attuned to and most likely to thrive in.

Living and learning among the company of others is what Tongan people are accustomed to.

- The setting should be at a retreat center or another accommodation with available eating facilities and other amenities.

It is critical that we provide a setting that will allow for maximum participation from the women. Traditionally, Tongan religious programs or functions always entail some sort of meal. These meals are generally prepared by the women in the church, thus taking them away from participating in the program. Hence, we must ensure that meals will be provided, allowing the women to fully participate in the retreat.

- Schedule

We must pay special attention to the scheduling for the entire retreat. Time is a fluid concept in the Tongan context; time does not necessarily control the program. Tongan people “go with the flow.” Rather than sticking to a schedule, they tend to do what feels right for the moment. In scheduling for the entire retreat, this notion of time should be respected, by building in some time for such possibility. At the same time, detailed scheduling with minute to minute break-down should be included, so that the women are aware of the time constraints and the amount of work that needs to be completed by the end of the retreat. In addition, strict adherence to beginning time should be

encouraged. This will have the desired effect of time efficiency but it will also be an opportunity for cross-cultural education. With all due respect to the Tongan people's notion of time, they must recognize that here in the United State, time is a controlling factor in all matters. They need to respect that reality and alter their life styles to meet that demand.

The entire retreat will consist of six different sessions. I envision that the retreat will be a weekend retreat. It could start on a Friday afternoon, and end on Sunday afternoon. Or it could start on a Saturday morning, and end on Sunday afternoon. The programs may be moved around to make the whole experience flow appropriately.

- This retreat will be held in the Tongan language.
- Reflection Time and Materials

We must ensure that there is ample reflection time built into the schedule and the agenda of the retreat. Reflection time may take place by sharing in small groups or pairs, or it could be done alone, or in written forms. In addition, we must also provide materials that will facilitate this process. Perhaps, a program book will include the agendas and schedule, and also provide space for answering questions, or journaling. To the extent possible, each session will end with a designated time for reflection about the spiritual practices in which the participants engaged.

- Setting

The setting should reflect the appropriate cultural practices. The Tongan people traditionally sit on the floor. The Tongan saying, *fofolā e fala kae talanga `a e kainga* (roll out the special mat so that the family could enter into dialogue) is instructive here. If at all possible, and when it is feasible, everyone should be sitting on the special mat, in a circle. Sitting on the floor shows mutual respect between the participants. The circle format ensures that everyone is a part of the discussion, and no one is left out.

Session 1 -- Opening Worship

Opening hymn

We will begin with a Tongan traditional hymn. This will be one of the old favorites, which may be entirely memorized by many of the participants. Many of the 633 Tongan hymns are committed to memory by the general membership of the church. Singing one of the old favorites with the proper theme will provide a spirited and enlivening atmosphere for the beginning of the retreat. Traditionally, the hymn is read one verse at a time and then the audience responds by singing that particular verse. One of the critical roles that must be filled is a *pulotu* or someone who starts the singing. She is the equivalent of a song leader. This person will be one of the retreat leaders, and not necessarily one of the participants.

Call to Worship

A responsive call to worship in which the leader will articulate our inherent need to call on God for help, and an ensuing response that confirms that need.

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 11: 18, 19

1 Peter 2:10

Prayer

This opening prayer will be in the corporate prayer form that the Tongans are accustomed to. The leader opens the prayer with the words: *tau lotu pea tali mai `etau lotu* (let us pray and please respond with a prayer). Those words are the participant's cue to start praying.

Everyone enters into prayer spontaneously and in unison. Generally, one kneels or bends her head forward in prayer. Others who may not be praying or who have completed their prayer sing softly in the background. Again, the *pulotu* will be the person who starts and leads the singing. The prayer ends when the praying ceases, and or the leader may close the prayer with her own prayer. This is followed with a song version of the Lord's Prayer.

This form of prayer ensures that each participant offers up a prayer. It will be a time of personal centering and focussing for the participants and a time in which each participant articulates her special need at this particular point in her life. Ultimately, starting off with this form of prayer invites the participant to actively participate in the act of

praying; thus she is participating in the act that connects her directly to God.

Introduction to the Retreat

The leader will offer a short narrative on the theology of the retreat and the reason for having this retreat.

As part of the introduction, the leader will invite the participants to reflect on the following questions: (1) Why have I come? (2) What must we do, individually and collectively, to experience God's presence during this retreat? (3) Reflect on the theme of this retreat and why do you think it was chosen as a theme? The questions will be written in the program book and each participant will record her reflections on the space that will be provided following the question. The leader will allow for open sharing of answers to the above questions. No answer is wrong, and everyone needs to be affirmed.

Community Building

(1) The participants will be asked to share in a group of five to seven people what they would like the group to know about their name. This sharing may include origin, family connections, nickname, etc.

In this activity, the participant's act of telling the story of her name will be an act of reaffirmation of who she is and her value as an individual. In addition, this initial introduction allows everyone to meet this woman, who is more than just a face across the room. Her story introduces us to a woman within the context of her family, of her people,

and indeed the stories draw us closer to the person. She does not exist in a vacuum but she is made more real and significant in the context of the story that she is telling. Within this context of the life of a Tongan woman immigrant, she is affirmed because within this realm, it is the values of hospitality, respect, dignity, and those that distinguish her as a Tongan woman, or her “Tonganness” that are affirmed and valued.

- (2) The participants will be directed to move to another group and recall together Biblical stories in which persons or people participated in a journey of some kind.

We begin to focus on the relevant subject of “journeying.” This activity allows the participant to look objectively at stories of “journeying.” At this stage in the retreat, they would not have had the opportunity to delve deep into their own stories, and so they would be able to objectively examine these biblical stories. This activity is not meant to be an intense examination of the stories, but rather it should be a cursory look and introduction to stories of journey in the Bible. This would provide an appropriate and amiable look at the available stories in the Bible.

As an example, the biggest “journeying” story in the Bible, the story of the Israelites journey, is a great source for discussion and reflection. The participants can focus on different parts of the Israelites journey. The story of Ruth and Naomi offer another possibility for examining one woman’s journey from one land to another. Abraham’s journey provides another possibility. In looking at these stories, the

participants will be encouraged answer the following questions: 1) What did the person or people leave behind? 2) What new things did they find in the new land? 3) What opportunities did the new land provide? 4) What obstacles did they face in the journey and in the new land? Further discussions and reflections may be appropriate as discussions progress within the groups.

(3) The participants will be directed to move to yet another group and share their stories of migration. This may include the reasons for moving, or it could be just something special or funny one remembers about her migration travel.

The participants begin to delve in further into their own stories. The opportunity to recount those stories is to be valued. Many of these women have been caught up in the race to survive in this country, and many have not had the opportunity to reflectively recount and tell or re-tell those stories. In telling their stories, they will come face to face with joys and pain that are a part of those stories.

In all of the three activities above, the stories play a major role in the education of the participants. Indeed, the stories *educate* the women about their past and the traditions that have supported them. The stories hold the women accountable to themselves and their predecessors. It reminds them of the values and meanings that are the foundation of their lives, but from which they may have strayed. The stories remind them of who they are, and urge them to return to their

true bearing. The stories also hold their hope for the future because these are stories of growth in the midst of adversity, and thus provide hope for a better future . The stories become a valuable teaching tool.

Reflections (5 minutes)

Share in groups of two about how the storytelling time helped you to see your life differently.

Closing Hymn

Again, one of the favorite Tongan hymns will be chosen.

Closing Prayer

One of the women should be chosen to say the closing prayer.

Tali Ui (Roll Calling)

We will end the first session with a traditional Tali Ui or Roll Calling service. The retreat leader or another woman chosen from the participants will lead the program with an opening hymn and prayer. Following the prayer, the leader will give a little devotional message, based on a chosen Bible verse. Someone other than the person leading the program will come up and do the roll calling. This will entail calling each participant one by one. Traditionally, the older women are called first. Each women will get up and respond by saying *ko au eni* (here I am). This is a free-flowing time of testimonial and reaffirmation of one's faith and spiritual journey. Normally one would end her testimonial with a short passage from the bible and/or from the hymn book; something

that reflects the current state of her relationship with God. She may even start off the song so that everyone can sing it, or anyone from the audience can start it off, and everyone joins in.

The *Tali Ui* or Roll Calling is an effective tool for evaluating one's personal relationship with God. As mentioned earlier, the *call* is representative of God calling his sheep by name. It is meant to be a time of inventory, where the participant is forced to reflect on her relationship with God. In the Tongan tradition, God is said to be *to`okaima`ananga* or all-knowing. In-fact, this term is one of the defining characteristics of God as the Tongans know Him, and they refer to Him by personifying God with this term. As such, one is apt to be candid and honest in her testimonial and self-reflection, as she is aware that nothing is hidden from God's sight. Having the *Tali Ui* or Roll Call in Session 1 will provide the participant with an opportunity for self-reflection early on in the retreat. This self-reflection will be pivotal in the over-all scheme of the retreat, as it would compel the participant to enter into relationship with God. It may not be an ideal Christian discipleship relationship, but it is sufficient at this point that the participant be cognizant of the fact that she must have a relationship with God.

The *Tali Ui* or Roll Calling also provides an opportunity for the participant to make a corporate and public declaration. With this public declaration, she not only makes herself accountable to God, but she is now also accountable to her fellow sojourners, among whom she has

made her declaration. This is an important factor in the lives of Tongan people. As mentioned earlier, Tongans are a communal people. By nature they are interdependent and this notion is consistent throughout everything in society, from family living to communal settings such as the church. The Tongans are ever mindful of their fellow sojourners. The Tongan social system is in large part a system of reciprocity with duties flowing to and from each member of society. In making her declaration to God, she is affirming her relationship to God and also to her fellow participants. In addition, she is redefining how she relates to God in this new land and to others.

Ako Tapu (Holy School)

We will end the first evening with a Ako Tapu or Holy School. The participants would be encouraged to participate in this prayer meeting, but there will be another opportunity for the same prayer meeting on the last evening of the retreat. I would suggest that while attendance at this prayer meeting is optional, attendance at the last prayer meeting is imperative, as it is a part of the retreat.

Before going any further in this prayer meeting, I would suggest that at the appropriate time when the participants enter into prayer, they should initially pray for themselves. During this time of prayer, they should remember their new surroundings and the challenges that they face in this new land. They should pray intentionally for the strength to

overcome this challenge. In addition, they should also pray for each and every other participants in the retreat.

This instant prayer meeting or *Ako Tapu* is meant to be an opportunity for the community to enter into prayer for the community and the work of the retreat. It is as Maria Harris puts it: it is prayer in the curriculum. In particular, in this early stage in the retreat it would be a great opportunity for the participants to pray together for the work of the retreat. Although the retreat leaders and others may have consistently prayed for this event, it is important that the participant become the praying agent praying for and with each other for the even that they are participating in.

Reflections

Before ending for the evening, spend a few minutes in reflection and asked the participants to share, if they are willing, about how they respond to the spiritual practices of *Tali Ui* and *Ako Tapu*.

SESSION 2: Town Meeting -- My Life as an Immigrant Women

Tali Lotu (Pre-Prayer/Program Time)

As mentioned earlier, each session will begin with the traditional singing while awaiting the start of the program. This is an important time of ushering in not just the participants, but more importantly, the Holy Spirit. The singing provides an authentic and familiar impression for the participants. Such familiarity will be instrumental in bringing about or *birthing* a transformational experience.

Opening Hymn

Again, it would be appropriate to invite one of the participants to read the hymn. There are many familiar hymns with appropriate themes that can be used here.

Opening Prayer

Again, the retreat leader can offer the prayer or invite one of the participants to offer the prayer.

Town Meeting

This activity will be a traditional Tongan town meeting. The setting will be as mentioned earlier. All the participants will sit on the Tongan mats on the floor in a circle or oval shape. The participants will be encouraged to share their concerns involving their lives as Tongan immigrant women in this society. What does that life entail? What are some of its joys? What are some of its pains? What is one's everyday life like in this setting? This will be a time of free style sharing and dialogue. Each woman will take a turn in the sharing. She will be encouraged to be mindful of the time, but to be thorough and not to sacrifice the content of her story. The participants will also be encouraged to be candid and honest, without feeling ashamed of her situation. There should be no rigid time constraints for this part of the session. This activity should take-up the whole morning.

At the end of this session, the group will be able to come up with some clear statement about the life of the Tongan immigrant community.

It might be helpful to move into smaller groups after the initial meeting, and to allow the smaller groups to look at the Tongan immigrant community from different perspectives. One group may be asked to come up with common problems in the Tongan society. Another group may be asked to look at how the women contribute to those problems, or what can be done to alleviate those problems. Yet another group can come up with some possible solutions to problems in the Tongan society. At the end of this session, there should be some clearly defined statement about the state of the Tongan people's lives in the United States.

This is a time of story telling. The stories will bind the participants together. The participant's stories, though they are many, will have a unifying theme, thus binding everyone in the story. The participants will recognize that they share the same joys and pains. The stories will unify them and they will identify with each other.

In following Freire's method for empowerment of the community, it would be appropriate to do some problem-solving at this stage in the retreat. The retreat leaders may organize the information gleaned from the story-telling by noting the themes in the stories. Common themes will be grouped together. The women will then decide which one is a priority and then work on solutions in small groups. Each small groups will then report to the larger group.

The Town Meeting will be an important tool in the women's education. The Tongan concept of *faka`apa`apa* (respect) and *feveitokai`aki* (mutual respect flowing to and from each member) is an innate part of a Tongan person's character. Entering into dialogue in this form will have the effect of fleshing out the issues that are in their stories. It will also have the natural effect of reminding the participants of their inter-connectedness and their mutual respect for each other. Life in the new land has meant displacement and disconnectedness for these women. Not only are they removed geographically from Tonga, but the comfort of a familiar culture and existence was suddenly swept away from her. By providing this traditional forum of communication to her, we erase some of the feelings of disconnectedness and displacement that have characterized her life for so long. By offering her these traditional tools for learning and living, we empower her to grow in what is most natural, what she is accustomed to.

Reflections

Once again, spend a few minutes reflecting on the reality of the immigrant life as brought out in the Town Meeting model. Allow everyone to characterize their feelings about the information gathered using one word, and share the reason for doing so.

Lunch

During meal time, the participants will be encouraged to stand up and offer a speech. This is a Tongan customary practice. Anyone who is

moved to make a speech may get up and speak. The content of the speech depends on the speaker. She may offer words of thanks, words of encouragement, or she may offer some funny stories or bantering. It is not meant to be a serious discourse, rather it is meant to be light-hearted fun, with components of gratitude and respect.

The basis of this custom comes from the Tongan people's tendency to live a systematic way of life. In the Tongan life, there is always a right and proper way to do things. The idea is that a meal should not be taken for granted. Hence, it is incumbent on the people enjoying the meal to get up and offer a word of gratitude and encouragement for the people who prepared the food, and for everyone else who is partaking of the food. This is perhaps the equivalent of dinner music in the Western culture. In the Tongan context, words of gratitude, appreciation, respect, love, etc., are spoken during the meal as a part of the reciprocal duties of the people partaking the meal. They come and eat but they are also expected to give something in return, perhaps, a speech.

SESSION 3: Reflection and Life-Mapping Activity

The participant will have a couple of hours to spend in quiet reflection and to do a life-mapping activity. There will be several individual reflection pieces from which the participants can choose. People will be reminded that this is an individual activity.

The life-mapping activity will be another tool that the participant can use in self-appraisal. The participants will be asked to do two

different maps. The primary purpose for the activity is to provide the participants with a method for looking at their spiritual journey and their journey as immigrant women. The following is a sample life-mapping activity.

My Journey with God

You will need two pieces of poster-size paper and two colored markers or pencils. (These items will be provided.) Follow the steps below, organizing your information in any layout that you would prefer.

Steps in the activity:

1. Identify places and events in your lifetime where you experienced spiritual growth. Write them down or draw symbols signifying those places and events on a piece of paper. How old were you then? Write down the time they took place, if you can remember.
2. Respond to the following in writing or drawing:
 - A. Identify moments of power and powerlessness in your life.
 - B. Identify places and situations where you encountered problems.
 - C. Identify factors that sustain your spiritual journey.
 - D. Identify factors that hinder your spiritual journey
 - E. Identify times in your life where relationships failed.
 - F. Identify moments of grief when loved ones died.

- G. What were the physical, spiritual, and moral resources needed to cope with the above losses and solve the problems?
- H. How have the above situations helped you to be a resource to others?
3. Using one colored pen or pencil, connect the items indicating moments of despair and powerlessness. Using a different color, connect all of the items indicating power and strength.
 4. In the life, death of resurrection of Christ, we can see moments of powerlessness and moments of power and strength. Reflect on the Cross of Jesus as you look at your moments of powerlessness. Reflect on the Resurrection of Jesus as you look at your moments of power and strength.
 5. Reflect on Philippians 4:13 – *I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me*. Memorize it. Reflect on what it means to be *strengthened* by God. The women will be asked to look at their life map and ask to identify time when they needed the strength of Christ to live out their lives. How did this strength come about? Given the past ways that God has worked in their past difficult moments, how might they understand the strength of God with them today? How might weaknesses become strength? And finally, how might we be a strength to one another?

My journey to a New World

You will need two pieces of poster-size paper or newsprint and two colored markers or pencils. (These items will be provided.) Follow the steps below, organizing your information in the layout that you would prefer.

1. What are some of the reasons you migrated to the New land?
2. Respond to the following in writing, or by drawing:
 - A. Identify moments of growth, success, and happiness in your life in the new land.
 - B. Identify times of failure, loss, and unhappiness in your life in the new land.
 - C. What were the physical, spiritual, and moral resources available to you in your life in the new land?
 - D. What supportive resources are available to you in the new world?
 - E. How has your life-style changed for the better?
 - F. How has your life-style changed for the worse?
 - G. How has your value system changed for the better?
 - H. How has your value system changed for the worse?
3. Connect all the items indicating a negative fact in your life in the new land with one of the colored pens or pencils.

4. Connect all the items indicating a positive fact in your life in the new land with a different color pen or pencil.
5. In the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we can see moments of powerlessness and moments of power and strength. Reflect on the Cross of Jesus as you look at your moments of pains, powerlessness, loss, regrets, and sadness. Reflect on the resurrection of Jesus as you look at your moments of strength, success, gains, and happiness.
6. Reflect on Philippians 4:13 – *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* Memorize it and live it out as you continue your journey with God in a new land.

Session 4: Town Meeting 2 -- Journeying with God in a New land

This will be another meeting on the mats, *fofola e fala, kae talanga e kainga*. The participants will come together once again in the format discussed earlier. This time, they will focus on the maps that they had created earlier. Each participant will have a chance to share her maps, unless she chooses not to share. In addition, there will be information gleaned from the first Town Meeting. The facilitator will then lead the discussion toward a conclusion that will merge the women's experiences so that we can find some tangible method for helping the participants to "journey with God in this new land". Ultimately, the participants should

come up with Ten Principles that they believe will enable them to better “journey with God in this new land.”

It is critical that these ten principles come out of this “town meeting.” Having the participants come up these principles is beneficial in many ways. First, the act of creating the ten principles is empowering. The women’s participation strengthens their sense of agency and control over their lives. Second, the act of creating these principles is the process of *birthing* promoted by Keiti Ann Kanongata`a. By *giving birth* to these resolutions, the participants identify with them. By this act, the participants will be made accountable to ensure that they follow through with the actions suggested therein.

Reflection

Again, allow the participants to reflect on the sharing that occurred in the Town Meeting. How can the Tongan women be empowered to rise above the experiences of an immigrant woman?

Session 5: Ako Tapu or Holy School

Once again, the women will participate in the Ako Tapu. In this session, the participants will have the opportunity to explore the theology of the Ako Tapu and delve deeper into this form of prayer. Many Tongan women have not had the opportunity to be a part of the Ako Tapu. This will be an educational and experiential opportunity for all of the participants. At the beginning of the session, the leaders will spend a few minutes going over the form of the prayer, and will provide some time

for questionings. First timers will be urged to be open to where the Spirit will lead them during this time of prayer. Although participation is encouraged, it may not be appropriate at this point, where one may desire to enter into quiet reflection and silent prayer.

Session 6: Closing Service of Commitment

This will be a major worship experience. As part of that worship experience, the women will participate in a service of commitment, in which they commit themselves to do the Ten Principles created earlier in the retreat.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The life of an immigrant woman, as life itself, is a journey. There is never a time of “arrival.” Rather we grow in everything that we do. The goals of this project may never be fully attained. And indeed the goals may change, and it should change, as time evolves, and as our experiences educate us further.

Despite the fact that change is inevitable, I hope only that the essence of a Tongan woman may not be given up in the rush to survive in this New land. She is a woman who is self-less in her care and attention to her family. But it is not materialism that she is after. Rather it is the priceless *koloa* (goods) of the *api* life that she seeks: *ofa* or love and respect, *toka`i* (humility); *faka`apa`apa*, (respect) and obedience.

The reality of the New World is all too grim. But I have all the faith that the Tongan woman, if she uses her full God-given potentials as a woman, a mother, a sister, a grandmother, an immigrant woman in a new world, the Tongan family will yet be in-tact and prosper in this New World. The Religious Education tool that I have offered in the project is meant to educate the Tongan women in the new nuances of life in the New World. It is there to assist the Tongan women in her search for new roles in the New World. Her new roles, however, only complement her traditional roles. I have not attempted in any way to replace the roles of the Tongan women. Indeed, it is my adamant belief that the knowledge I

have gained in the classrooms of major powers in the world have only complemented my own innate knowledge that I brought with me from my humble *api*. That knowledge is priceless, and they form the basis for my very being. If I have strayed from this position anywhere in this paper, and have suggest that the Tongan traditions and custom are dispensable, I beg the pardon of the spirit of the keepers of my *api*. That was never my intention.

In looking to the future, it is my hope that this is only the beginning. Dialogue must continue on this field. And as mentioned earlier, the world of the Tongan women will change and evolve. The question of survival and of prosperity for the Tongan *api* in this New World, is at its core, a question of how much the Tongan women is willing to turn her life over to God and to journey with God in this New World. Indeed, the theories of Christian education, and of theology, will fall far short in answering this call. They will of course help to guide the way, but in the end, it is a question of faith. I will continue to pray and do my part by exercising my own faith along with others.

Appendix

Sample Research Questionnaire (one questionnaires per *family*)

1. How many families make-up this household?
2. Please state your occupation?
Please state your spouse's occupation?
3. How many jobs do you have?
4. How many jobs does your spouse have?
5. If you are self-employed, do you have the appropriate license for such work?
6. Do you own or rent your resident?
7. If you have children, are they attending appropriate level of school?
If you have adult children, did they graduate from high school?
Are they or did they attend college?
Did they graduate from college?

(translated from the Tongan language)

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